PS4 & XBOX ONE: THIEF, FFXV, DESTINY, INFAMOUS AND MORE

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XBOX ONE & PS4
THE LATEST INSIDE

DRAGON AGE: INQUISITION
BioWare on its first Xbox One & PS4 RPG

COMPLETE GUIDE TO MIYAMOTO
Celebrating the Mario creator's career

THE ELDER SCROLLS ONLINE
Revolutionising console MMOs?

THE FUTURE OF ZELDA


WHERE NINTENDO'S MOST PRESTIGIOUS FRANCHISE GOES FROM HERE

HIGHLIGHTS
■ LAUNCHING PS4 ■ DAVID CAGE ON BEYOND ■ CHILD OF LIGHT ■ MAD MAX ■ WORLD OF TANKS
■ TRIALS FRONTIER ■ EVERQUEST NEXT ■ GRAND THEFT AUTO V REVIEWED ■ HALO RETROSPECTIVE

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A *Micro Machines* TIE Interceptor, an afternoon at the UK's biggest play area and *Link's Awakening* on Game Boy. That was my best birthday ever, because *Link's Awakening* happened to be the first *Zelda* game I ever played, that weird fortune-telling owl putting the fright into me on endless camping holidays with my parents as I watched Koholint Island come to life under my scratched old fat Game Boy screen (that's why Marin is on the magazine's spine this month, by the way).

Zelda is a series of such prestige, at its best when reinventing itself on its own clock. I don't think any game encapsulates that bravery better than *Wind Waker*, which comes to Wii U in its strongest form yet. This month, we celebrated *Zelda* by speaking to its brilliantly talented custodian Eiji Aonuma about how it will evolve in the years to come and the nature of his creative process, exploring why this franchise lives in the hearts of its audience.

On the other end of the scale, we've got features on two existing series that are attempting risky but potentially amazing moves into new territory: *The Elder Scrolls Online* and *Dragon Age: Inquisition*.

As the Xbox One and PS4 get closer to release, we're starting to see past the visual wonder and into the potential of game design. These two titles, for me, hint at the scale of ambition we'll see on these consoles that'll hopefully change our hobby forever.

Samuel Roberts
EDITOR



GAMES™

BIKE







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02:12

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Correction: We apologise for spelling Dan Pinchbeck's name incorrectly in **games™** 138.


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(INTERVIEW)

PS4: Countdown To Launch

→ **games™** speaks to Sony's UK and Ireland managing director, Fergal Gara, about the impending launch of the PS4, the console's relationship with the PlayStation Vita, and what Sony has done to ensure the console delivers the best experience for both players and developers

Since the PS4's announcement, fan reaction has been exceptional. How are you maintaining that traction all the way up to launch?
The momentum is ample. What we're witnessing with the PS4 is truly a sea change. We're very, very confident with our demand – so confident, in fact, that we're having to manage expectations around 'Will everybody get [a console] on day one?' That's now looking difficult to deliver upon, but we'll certainly have lots of products at launch, up to Christmas, and beyond. Our problem now is fulfilling demand above and beyond any of the other prior consoles we've released to date.

What was the thinking behind the release date? Was a November launch always part of Sony's strategy?
Our policy has always been to release [the PS4] before Christmas 2013. November is a nice month, significantly before Christmas, and we've made it! We've had this month in mind for a very long time, and I'm absolutely delighted that all of the planning, all of the engineering, all of the production and the *enormous* amount of work that's gone into making all this possible has all come to fruition on time.

The PS Vita seems like a large part of the PS4's focus. Has the utilising the Vita's strengths as a console always been integral to the PS4's launch strategy?
We're really pleased that things are developing nicely around the PS Vita, and a few things that we've improved are the price point – which is clearly a major factor for customers. Secondly, the value of games available has continued to improve, and so while there are still blockbuster standalone titles (*Tearaway*, for example, or the *Batman* titles, or *Borderlands*), you've also got amazing value in the mega-pack series; PS+ is offering tremendous value across the platform, including beta games. And now you've got the opportunity to play PS4 games across the PSVita too, so the full value equation of the platform has improved dramatically. You can certainly get hold of many more games for less money, so that's tremendous. For anyone that suggested there wasn't a huge selection of games for the Vita, now you can have the PS4 catalogue to play on it. And they will be the highest-end gaming experiences available anywhere. So we're very confident that the Vita will find its significant niche, and we're confident the PS4 will be a core part of that.





Below It will be possible to stream almost any PS4 game on the Vita, as long as it doesn't require PS4 hardware-specific features, like the PlayStation Camera. Gara told us the PS4 was designed as a "sister device".

The Vita has always been indie-friendly. Why do you think it's been such a good platform for independent developers to showcase their creativity on?
It's part of the strategy, trying to embrace indies for the PlayStation: Vita is just one of our platforms, and there is a really strong indie story, both for Vita and PS4. It's great that [indies] are finding that the Vita platform helps them realise their creative ambitions. It all falls a bit around functionality, and a bit around company policy; we want to be the best place to play, and we want to be the best place for developers to develop. So that means an open strategy – one that's been held firm all year and underlined with the strong indie presence in our launch line-up.

Self-publishing has been getting a lot of attention in the industry recently. Did you predict it would be such a strong point when it came to next-gen hardware?
Well, if you go right back to 20 February, when Mark [Cerny] outlined the vision for the PS4, he said he spent five years getting to that point. The starting point on the five-year journey was talking to developers and trying



AS WE WENT TO PRESS, VALVE ANNOUNCED ITS OWN OPERATING SYSTEM, STEAMOS – MORE NEXT ISSUE



(ON THE PLUS SIDE)

→ Will the well-received service matter to the fortunes of PS4?

On the transition to PS4, PlayStation Plus is moving from an optional service that offers free games, exclusive trials and bonus content to a subscription-based model that you'll have to be a member of to play online games. Fergal Gara explained to us that this transition was something Sony "agonised over and thought about very carefully". According to Gara, Sony wanted to expand and improve their network services so they could fully unleash the power of the PS4, which required a big investment – hence the shift to a subscription-based model. However, Sony claims to be very mindful of offering the same value PS+ has always been known for, so it's a safe bet that we'll be seeing the same sort of free game offers that we did for the PS3.

> "We're very confident that the PS Vita will find its significant niche, and we're confident the PS4 will be a core part of that"
>
> Fergal Gara, Sony UK & Ireland



to make a platform that was ideal for them: we asked what needed to go into the toolkit – be it more power, ease of development or feature sets. We spoke to developers small and large. The vision of creating the best place to play, powering the best creators we have as an industry – that isn't a five-week or five-month strategy; it's a five-year strategy. We want to embrace publishers small and large, and we want to see the most diverse set of experiences. We want to unleash that creativity, and therefore what we've seen are some really strong business policies that make that possible – some really strong technology too.

Was the reaction self-publishing has got from gamers a surprise to you?

The reaction was on the higher end of expectations, I think. Is it gathering a bit more excitement that we thought? Yes, possibly. But it was always going to be important, but it's just gathered an extra bit of momentum. Because the console side of the industry is tempted to polarise games into enormous blockbusters, medium-sized games, and 'struggling' titles, the digital side of things gives the opportunity to publish smaller titles more economically, and an open platform gives everyone the chance to have a hit. [On PSN] we have unlimited shelf space, a more economical route to market and lots of support to help developers get into gaming. We allow gamers access to a diverse set of gaming experiences at a diverse set of gaming price points, and I think it is very valuable.





Inset *Borderlands 2* will be bringing the frenetic gun-based looter to the Vita in 2014.



Inset PS4 exclusives like *Killzone: Shadow Fall* could provide the cutting edge Sony needs over the competition.

→ BLITZ GAMES STUDIOS SADLY CLOSES FOR BUSINESS AFTER 23 YEARS OF DEVELOPMENT IN THE UK →

(OPINION)

Why Microsoft's U-Turns Won't Matter at Launch

→ Having undergone a complete turnaround, the direction of Microsoft's Xbox One now seems to have settled, which can only mean good news for gamers

After announcing the launch of the Xbox One on 21 May, Microsoft has repeatedly backtracked on its policies due to negative consumer reactions. Many commentators claimed that these reversals made Microsoft look weak, and showed the company was unsure of the Xbox One's focus. Firstly, the controversial always-on DRM policy was repealed, with Microsoft opting to make the feature optional for publishers to implement if they wished. There was also the announcement that the console would not have to always be online to work – a policy which has concerned a lot of gamers without reliable broadband connections. Then came the revelation that Xbox One would work without Kinect after all, and that – despite being shipped with the accessory – it wasn't absolutely necessary to use the console (this also allayed fears that Kinect would always be 'watching' players – something that a certain amount of the consumer base found unsettling and intrusive). Finally, there was the announcement that indie developers would be able to self-publish on the Xbox One – which had apparently always been the case; it was just badly communicated by Microsoft.

Some have argued that these U-turns reveal that Microsoft would clearly rather bow to consumer pressure rather than stick to its strategic guns. This isn't wholly true, however; Microsoft would have been arrogant and aloof if they kept on travelling the path they were on with the Xbox One. The willingness to alter strategies shows Microsoft is canny, and want to deliver the best consumer experience possible with the Xbox One. After its about-face, Microsoft will effectively launch a console that is identical to the PS4: no DRM, no compulsory camera hardware, an open platform for indies and the ability to play offline. You've also got similar services offered with regards to PlayStation Plus and Xbox Live – both now paid subscription services required for online play, that offer free games and other perks as other additional incentives.

For us here at **games™**, the Xbox One also has the upper hand when it comes to announced exclusives. First and foremost, you've got Microsoft's pseudo-mascot Master Chief making a return in 343 Industries' *Halo 5*. The *Halo* franchise, a flagship series for MS, always delivers commercially and critically, and could well keep a lot of 360 loyalists on board for the Xbox One. There's also *Titanfall*, which has garnered hugely positive fan reaction at E3, PAX and Gamescom – and whose developers



Above *Titanfall* will be a huge seller, and it's a title Sony will have to live without.



Right We might be waiting a while before new ideas reach the consoles.

XBOX ONE TIMELINE

→ **A difficult publicity cycle**



2013

21 MAY
- IGN reports that the recently announced Xbox One console will only function if the Kinect 2.0 is plugged in.
- It's announced that games can only be installed to one console. To use it on another, you need to pay for an activation code.

22 MAY
- News breaks that indie developers won't be able to self-publish; the response is naturally quite heated.
- It's also revealed that 360 headsets and controllers are incompatible with the hardware.



6 JUNE
- Microsoft says you can only play a game offline for 24 hours after registration. If you don't register, you can only play for an hour.

10 JUNE
- Sony announces that the PS4 won't have compulsory digital rights management or have to always be online.

→ XBOX ONE INDIE TITLES WILL NOT BE RELEASED UNTIL 2014, ACCORDING TO MICROSOFT'S PHIL HARRISON



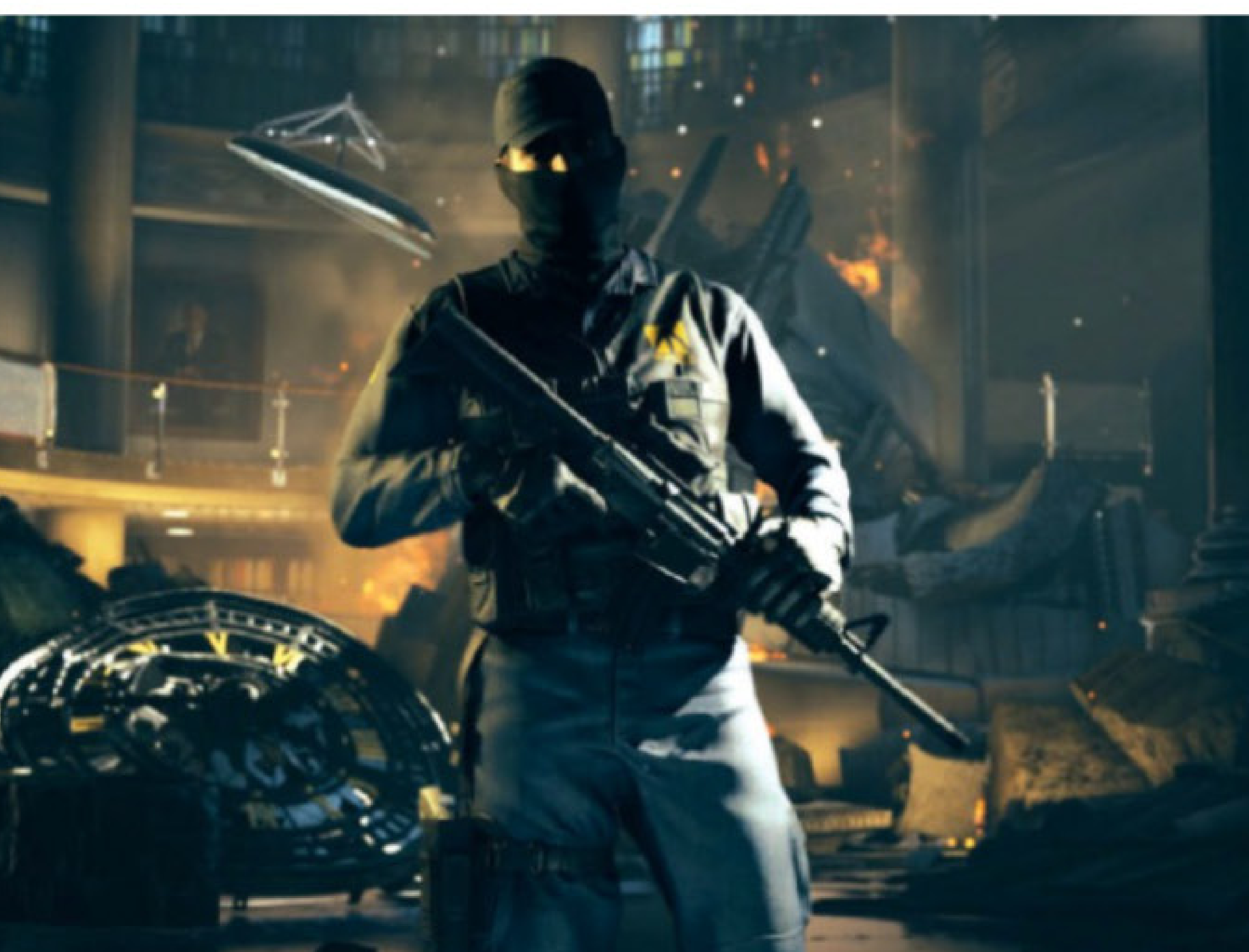
" Microsoft is keen to point out that it is worth the asking price "

(Respawn) have been vocal about their support for Microsoft's policy reversals. There's also *Dead Rising 3, Forza Motorsport 5, Quantum Break, Ryse* and *Project Spark* to look forward to, with exclusive console releases on Xbox One.

The only contentious issue remaining between the two consoles is the price point, which is still a decisive factor for a lot of gamers. Weighing in at a whopping £429/€499/$499 (compared the PS4's £349/€399/$399), Microsoft is keen to point out that the console is worth the higher asking price, repeatedly pointing to its varied functionality with regards to the Kinect 2.0 sensor – the message that keeps being reinforced is that the Xbox One isn't just a box for gaming; it's a device built for entertainment and communication, too. In an announcement at Gamescom, MS even opted to buffer the console's value for money by offering free downloads of *FIFA 14* with every pre-order. We can now see both on similar terms.

The space between the two consoles started as a gulf, with the favour clearly weighed on Sony's side, but that gap is closing, and the lines will continue to blur further as we approach the next-gen launch dates. Commenting specifically on consumer perception, however, it may be time to forgive Xbox One's early publicity blunders and let the consoles sell themselves. It's a great time to be a gamer, and the war for hardware supremacy between Sony and Microsoft is only going to benefit us as consumers in the long run. 







Inset *Forza 5* will no doubt be a huge draw for early Xbox One consumers.





14 JUNE – Microsoft clarifies Xbox One's Live service will only be available in 21 countries at launch (excluding Poland, where *The Witcher 3* is being developed).

19 JUNE – Post-consumer feedback/PS4 announcement, Microsoft announces a reversal on online policy: a permanent connection is no longer required.

19 JUNE – Microsoft also scraps region-locking and DRM restrictions for used games – at the cost of reselling downloaded titles.

26 JUNE – Xbox Support reveals an adapter is in production to allow 360 headsets to be used on the Xbox One.

1 JULY – Don Mattrick – head of Microsoft's Interactive Entertainment Business – joins social games giant Zynga as CEO.

12 AUGUST – Microsoft confirms that Kinect is no longer a necessity for the Xbox One's functionality.

20 AUGUST – ID@Xbox is revealed – a scheme that allows indie developers to self-publish on the Xbox One.

→ GRAND THEFT AUTO V LAUNCH ECLIPSES THE LAUNCH OF EVERY GAME IN THE SERIES EVER COMBINED →

(INAFUNE SPEAKS)

East Meets West

→ We caught up with gaming visionary Keiji Inafune and Team Ninja's Yosuke Hayashi to discuss the differences between Eastern and Western games developers, and what each side can learn from the other

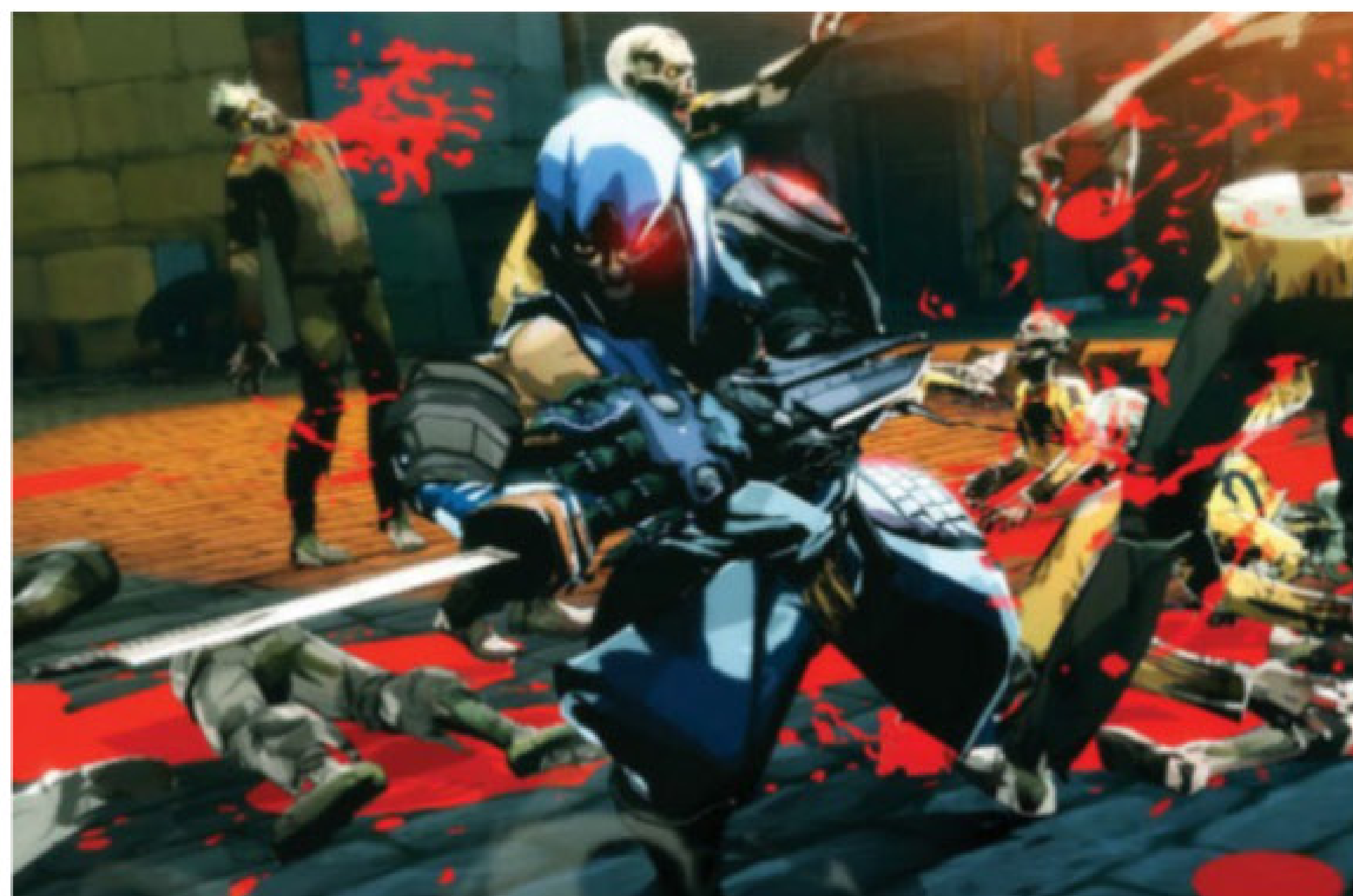
It's fair to say Japan dominated the console market in the Nineties – during the PSone era, Japanese developers delivered titles that broke new ground in just about every genre. From fighting games to RPGs and survival horror to action adventures, Japanese titles were some of the most successful games of the 32-bit age – a new generation of creators re-energised the market, while braver publishers over here were more successful at putting such revolutionary titles out in the UK, where they had failed to do so before.

That console domination continued into the sixth generation, too, but by the end of it, with the closure of Clover Studio and the disbanding of Team Silent, things started to shift in time for the seventh generation. The last few years have seen the increase of Japanese publishers looking to Western developers to solve franchises, with so far only one noticeably positive result from such a bizarre phenomenon (*DmC*). It's a practice that has, in some cases, extracted the identity of what made a series work to begin with.

Keiji Inafune has always been an advocate of cross-culture collaboration, stating that Japanese developers are falling behind their Western peers, and that only innovation can bring the region's creative output back up to scratch. "Japanese developers have their own process of creating games and western developers have their own process of creating games. I think it's important to be open to different ways of creation," he explains. "Right now, the [Japanese] process itself is weak, so it's important to look around at different processes and learn from those differences to strengthen our own development practices. Working with a different culture will bring you different perspectives: Western developers have different strengths, and [when working with them] you have to be open to those strengths and bring them out. There are inconveniences in doing that, of course – it's a different culture, a different area physically – so it's easy to focus on the negatives and problems. But you have to get past those and realise there's something better to be gained from collaboration. [You have to] play on each other's strengths to create the best game you can."

THIS PHILOSOPHY OF inter-cultural idea merging can be seen in Team Ninja's latest game, *Yaiba: Ninja Gaiden Z*, a collaboration with American developers Spark Unlimited which gives the stalwart ninja action franchise a zombie-slaying twist. "I wanted to make a game with ninjas *and* zombies," he tells us. "Ninja games are something that really represent Japanese development, and we bought zombies into the mix – zombies being something that works really well in the west. This gives us the chance to make a really fun game that we couldn't make just in Japan, but also couldn't be made just in the West, either."

Here, Yosuke Hayashi jumps in to explain how the collaboration with a Western



Below The title is currently being developed by three studios: Inafune's Comcept, the American Spark Unlimited and, of course, Team Ninja itself.



PLAYSTATION VITA CULT HIT GRAVITY RUSH HAS A SEQUEL TEASED AT TGS 2013, ANNOUNCEMENT INCOMING?



developer gives *Yaiba* a unique perspective on the ninja-action sub-genre. "Western developers have a different image of ninjas than we do. We've grown up with them, and we've created our own image of them within *Ninja Gaiden*. There are, for example, ninja codes you need to follow. [Spark] asked 'Why do you need to follow those rules?' But it's something you need to do. That's part of being a ninja. So it's interesting to see the different take and understanding on what a ninja is in the eyes of a western developer."

But the opposite is also true – we have a different understanding of zombies to a Japanese audience. "Zombie entertainment isn't as popular in Japan, and not a lot of Japanese people understand what makes zombies cool," explains Inafune. "So when we work with a Western developer who knows zombies, it's easier to get ideas. We can teach what makes a ninja a ninja, and Westerners can teach what makes a zombie a zombie."

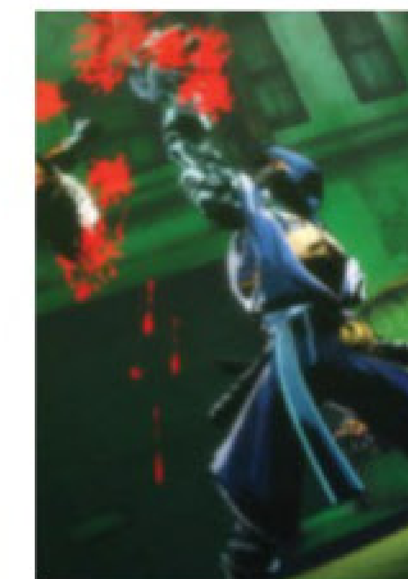
THERE IS A distinct Western design aesthetic that has spilled over into the game's art direction, too. Team Ninja has never ventured down the comic-book style route, and Hayashi admits the stylistic decision of *Yaiba* threw up its own challenges, but the end result has been worth it. "It's definitely involved a lot of back and forth, but there are a lot of games out there, and it seems *Yaiba* stands out and people recognise it as something different. It seems we've done a good job; people are receptive to the art style."

It's clear that Inafune and Hayashi are keen to keep pushing global co-operation. Going forward, Inafune told us he wants to keep pushing innovation and creativity. "Seeing the response of Team Ninja to this collaboration, and seeing them in action, I definitely feel there's a lot of potential for Team Ninja to have more of these collaborations. I think for the future of the medium in general, and for the future of Japanese development, it's very important to be open to [Western] ideas and see what other people do with our ideas."

The work Team Ninja is putting into *Yaiba: Ninja Gaiden Z* with Spark is looking like a dream project – every aspect of the development process seems to live up to his internationally open production philosophy. It'll be interesting to see if this approach garners the results Team Ninja and Inafune expect.



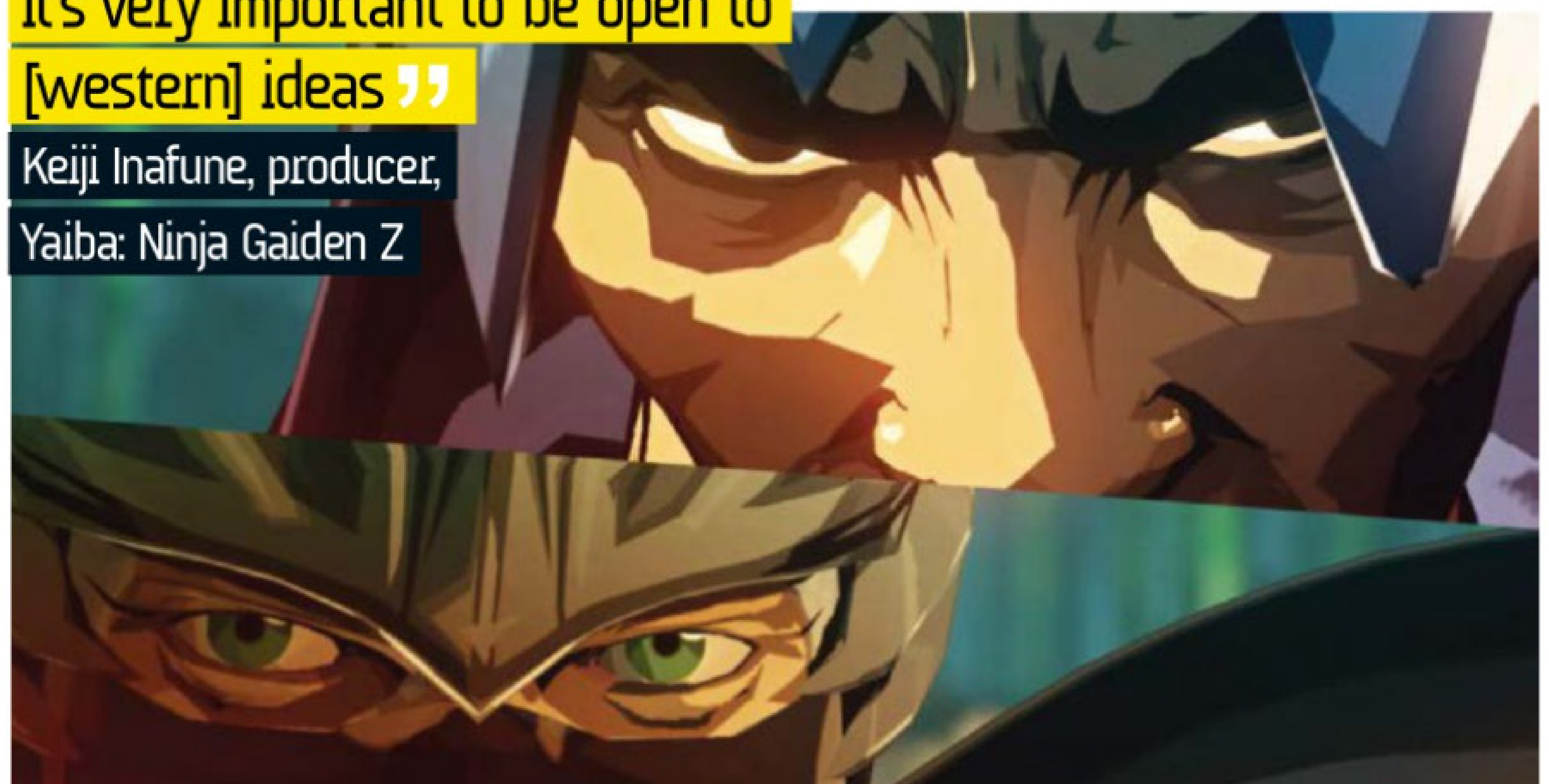




Above Is a Western influence positive for Japanese games?

Below *Yaiba*'s artistic style is a departure.

> "I think for the future of the medium in general, and for the future of Japanese development in particular, it's very important to be open to [western] ideas"
>
> Keiji Inafune, producer, Yaiba: Ninja Gaiden Z



Inafune on Dead Rising 3

→ What the creator thinks of the sequel

When Inafune set up the *Dead Rising* franchise, he wanted to capture the experience of a zombie movie and translate it into gaming. He was inspired by the humour that is intrinsic to the zombie genre. "Zombies are stupid, and there's just something about that stupidity that's funny," he explains.

His reaction to what's been shown of *Dead Rising 3*, then, is to be expected: "I saw the E3 footage, and I know that's not everything about the game, but my impression was there wasn't much humour in there.

I know they're still working on it, but I hope there's a little more humour."

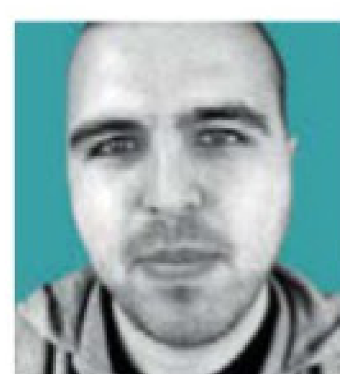


→ YOU CAN NOW DRESS UP LIGHTNING AS AERITH THANKS TO LIGHTNING RETURNS' PRE-ORDER DLC →

#TRENDING
with NowGamer.com's Ryan King



Games Can't Mature Until We Do



I haven't played *Tomb Raider* yet. It's one of the games on the Pile Of Shame that grows ever higher next to my TV, sandwiched between *XCOM: Enemy Unknown* and *BioShock Infinite*. Lots of people tell me *Tomb Raider* is good and I should definitely play it. No-one ever mentions the 'rape scene'.

That may have jogged your memory somewhat. As part of the media campaign leading up to release, Square-Enix released the 'Crossroads' trailer for *Tomb Raider* at E3 2012, which featured a segment where Lara is groped and forced to defend herself from her attacker. This lead to the 'rape' controversy, fuelled by executive producer Ron Rosenberg using that word in an interview and supercharged by the snowballing wrath of social media. The defence was that the scene made sense in context of Lara's journey. It was an odd decision for Square Enix or Crystal Dynamics to present it without context in an E3 trailer then but it seems the argument held some water – when *Tomb Raider* was finally released, it was widely praised as a fresh and successful take not only on the classic gameplay but Lara's character too. There's an emerging trend of fury and outrage that flares up whenever games challenge morality in any manner, exacerbated by the combination of publishers drip-feeding content that can be misinterpreted and social media fuelling the need to pass instant judgment on topical conversations to stay relevant.

> Games shouldn't be afraid to face controversy

A recent example: Dennaton Games is considering removing a sexual assault scene from *Hotline Miami 2*. Or not quite: the scene implies sexual assault, which is then stopped by the director, as it's actually part of an in-game movie. Perhaps the intention was to create a reaction where we've become numb to gratuitous violence, perhaps not. It's hard to say – after some sections of the media took offence, Dennaton Games has removed this scene from the demo and might not make it to the full game either. It was clearly naïve to put that scene in the demo if it needed full context but what's worrying is the reaction has nevertheless changed the studio's vision and we could now end up with a censored version of *Hotline Miami 2* without having ever glimpsed and understood what it was Dennaton Games wanted to achieve to begin with.

The point is this: games shouldn't be afraid to face controversy. The only way gaming can grew as a medium and explore its boundaries is by finding them to begin with, not by having its spiky edges and identity blunted by the wrath of those who have taken offence to ill-advised marketing assets. There's also responsibility on the publishers to not offer up controversial material to generate column inches and conversation but while it works, it's unlikely they'll change tactics.

No, the onus remains firmly with us. We are right to talk about controversial scenes and issues in games, to challenge the views of game creators and to ask ourselves what it is they wanted to achieve. But it's not always fair to use outrage and scorn to influence that vision before it is fully formed. We should be ashamed whenever a game creator is browbeaten into altering their vision in fear of sending a few moral compasses spinning off their axis.

Games have to deal with the reality that they're maturing in the age of reactionary social media, a trial that film, literature and TV didn't have to endure. Reasonable debate and respect for the creators will help the medium progress.



■ Are gamers becoming too reactionary or should Dennaton Games have provided more context?

Ryan King is editor of NOWGamer.com

Five Things About

The Influences Of Batman: Arkham Origins

After games™ took a trip to Warner Bros. Games Montreal for time with *Batman: Arkham Origins* earlier in the year, we put together a list of graphic novels that we felt influenced the prequel's narrative. "You were close," was the response from creative director Eric Holmes, setting the record straight with his own list for consideration. So, in his own words…



Batman: Year One

Frank Miller and David Mazzucchelli's classic that tossed Batman into the gutter of a grittier, dirtier Gotham than you thought would ever hit print. It's the granddaddy of all 'early career' Batman stories, showing Bruce Wayne learning what he has to do in order to make a difference. *Read it*. If you've read it, *read it again*. Side note: Cliff Bleszinski once used my loaned copy of this amazing story to wedge a door open as he collected his mail. I saw him do this through the door of my office and called him out on it. His response: 'It's not like it's a first edition.' It was a first edition.



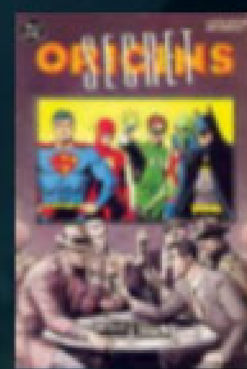
Batman: The Long Halloween

Overly recommended when anyone asks for must-read lists, but absolutely worth bringing up one more time. Ultra-dense, rich exploration of Batman in his early career space. Many characters carry over from *Year One*. Not all of them make it out. Not many people can make Batman's cape work like Sale. An enormously influential piece of storytelling and not just in comics – clearly has some scenes that inspired Chris Nolan in his work.



Batman: The Man Who Laughs

Ed Brubaker's retelling of how Batman met the Joker for the first time. You can feel the shock value of Bruce Wayne – someone who has dedicated his life to fighting crime – as he finds someone he simply doesn't understand.



Batman: The Man Who Falls

This is a story I've read – and re-read – at different times in my life, appreciating something new each time. There aren't a lot of stories of Bruce Wayne as he trains himself to become the Batman – this is a window into that. It's somehow everything you need to know about Batman in one moment that is him, in his entirety. Heartfelt. And I'm a sucker for anything that plays with structure.



Joker (Azzarello and Bermejo)

Like the character, *Joker* shakes things up. Characters are spiritually who you know, but visually are shaken up. The same but different. The narrative perspective is fresh – Azzarello gives us a view of The Joker through the eyes of one of his goons. Visually inventive. Narratively shocking.



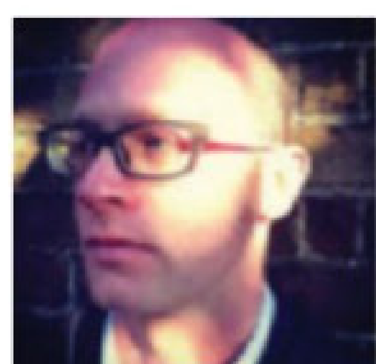
> "Cliff Bleszinski once used my loaned copy of this amazing story to wedge a door open as he collected his mail"

Eric Holmes, Warner Bros. Games Montreal

ROOM WITH A VIEW

With The Chinese Room's Dan Pinchbeck

Does the culture of Let's Play ruin the mystique of videogames?



The other week we found ourselves caught between two gaming cultures. For a bunch of reasons, we didn't make a trailer for *Amnesia: A Machine for Pigs*, and instead Frictional Games gave copies to Let's Play people and let them broadcast the first thirty minutes of the game. My initial response was pretty critical: especially for a horror game, a major part of the experience is *not knowing* what's around the next corner, and watching footage in advance can only damage that. A lot of hardcore *Amnesia* fans felt the same way, particularly as they'd been waiting for the game for 18 months and found it really hard to stay away, even though they knew it'd lessen the play experience. But another chunk of fans were really pro the decision, and I ended up wondering if I'd just been a grumpy old man about it all.

> I'm happy to admit Let's Play culture leaves me a bit baffled

Now, interesting, I am a grumpy old man, so I'm happy to admit Let's Play culture leaves me a bit baffled. Sometimes you have to shuffle off into the wings leaving the young their cool new thing you just don't fit into and don't understand. My parents thought *Doom* was literally going to cause society to gib on mass scale, so that's okay. I have to admit though, I just don't see the fascination of watching a game that took months of blood, sweat and tears to make, that's been crafted to create a really particular feel and emotion, reduced to a dumb joke. It's like going to the cinema, but actually what you are interested in isn't the movie, it's a guy at the back who's shouting "Penis! Penis! Boobies! Penis!" all the way through it. Okay, so if the movie happens to be by Woody Allen, I can understand it needs help, sure. But three hours later it's got to be getting pretty tired.

So maybe it's not 100 per cent bad, just that I'm old and tired and past my best. Quite a few people wrote to us and said that for them, watching comedy Let's Plays was their core experience. They either didn't play *Amnesia* because they found it too scary (limited sympathy: the grumpy old man starts resorting to G.I.Jane-esque snorts of "Man up!" or "Grow a pair" – both of which are ideal lines for the budding Let's Play maker) or that they just don't like the games as much as they enjoy the Let's Play. I get that. Personally, I'd much prefer watching David Cameron on the telly if every time he spoke he was legally forced to duck his doughy face into a bowl of warm sick. The only thing I'd ask is this: please buy the game anyway.

Because even assuming it's done with the greatest respect (and like being pirated, there is a sick pride that someone thought what you are doing is worth taking the piss out of), the bottom line is that Let's Play uses content for free that cost someone else a lot of time and money to make. So think of us humble grumpy old folk when the penis gags start flying, and send a buck our way too.



If Let's Play existed in the days of *Doom*, the surprises would surely be for nothing.

Dan Pinchbeck is the creative director at The Chinese Room, currently working on Everybody's Gone To The Rapture. His views aren't necessarily representative of games™.



Nintendo's 2DS is thinking of the children

→ Why the surprise console will be a family hit

Nintendo is savvy – it occupies a certain niche within the gaming stratosphere, and has carved out a nook for itself as the family-friendly company that delivers accessible content with a wide, multi-generational appeal. Nintendo knows that a vast proportion of its handheld audience falls into the 12 and under category, and the release of the 2DS is aimed directly at that demographic. The 3DS received criticism for its stereoscopic 3D feature – projecting 3D images to the naked eye without the need for glasses, many gamers complained of headaches and eyestrain when using the device. By removing that aspect from the console altogether, Nintendo has allayed the fears of parents not wishing to negatively impact the maturing eyesight of their children. Nintendo has also pulled off a feat of marketing genius by opting to release the console on 12 October – the same day the child-friendly *Pokémon X/Y* games are released. Coming in at £109.99, the 2DS is roughly £30 cheaper than you can pick up a 3DS for, and there are certain to be *Pokémon X/Y* bundles available at launch – in perfect time for Christmas. Having had hands-on time with the console, we agree that it fulfils its purpose in terms of delivering more ergonomic comfort, but we cannot help but feel that what the 2DS has gained in all-round accessibility, it's lost in aesthetic appeal. The console isn't the prettiest looking piece of hardware but we guess that's a sacrifice Nintendo was willing to make in order to offer a more affordable entry-level handheld to a broader market.

Remembering Nintendo visionary Hiroshi Yamauchi

→ Looking back at the unforgettable legacy of the pioneering Nintendo president



Hiroshi Yamauchi, who held the position of company president at Nintendo from 1949 until 2002, sadly passed away on 19 September 2013. While his name might not resonate with gamers quite as strongly as Shigeru Miyamoto or Gunpei Yokoi, his impact on the industry surpassed that of his contemporaries. At the time he took the role of president at the company, Nintendo exclusively manufactured playing cards. Over the ensuing decades his prescient business acumen diversified the company's portfolio, expanding into toy-making and, eventually, videogames.

Yamauchi had a keen eye for aptitude among his employees, launching the careers of Yokoi and Miyamoto, who would become instrumental to the studio's early success in the home videogame marketplace. Such was Yamauchi's intuition and decidedly firm grasp on his business that he commanded an uncompromising approval process on all internal software. Nintendo garnered a sterling reputation over its competitors due to its superior catalogue of titles, and Yamauchi's discerning eye no doubt cemented the company's worldwide dominance in the industry.

While a businessman through and through, his impact on the medium cannot be overstated, shepherding Nintendo through the arcade business into the home console market, pivotal in introducing the world to an unforgettable cast of imaginative heroes that continue to steer the company into enduring fortune.

He waved goodbye to Mario, Link, et al in 2002 when he stepped down as president following the launch of the GameCube, joining the board of directors before leaving the company entirely in 2005. It's no overstatement to say that he was utterly fundamental in shaping videogames as we know them today, and while his presence will be missed greatly, his legacy will remain undimmed.



A LINK TO THE FUTURE

SERIES' OVERSEER EIJI AONUMA TALKS TO GAMES™ ABOUT LINKING THE PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE OF THE LEGENDARY FRANCHISE

***The Legend of Zelda* is a franchise birthed by Shigeru Miyamoto, but one whose legacy has been inspired by Eiji Aonuma.** *Ocarina Of Time* boldly realised the adventitious planes of Hyrule in three dimensions, but under the latter's stewardship the series has witnessed its most radical transformations. From subverting the established formula with *Majora's Mask*'s three-day cycle, overhauling the art direction in *Wind Waker*, through to cultivating the divisive transition to motion controls, with Aonuma at the helm *Zelda* is nothing if not joyously unpredictable.

But even with his innate ability to surprise, it's hard to imagine that Aonuma predicted the gargantuan undertaking that has consumed his life over the past year. Not only revisiting the franchise's most contentious entry for a HD re-release of *Wind Waker*, but also divide his time between two bespoke instalments – the 3DS' *A Link Between Worlds* and an untitled Wii U release. »



Wind Waker holds a unique position within the series' canon, directly relating to the events at the end of *Ocarina Of Time*. The waterlogged world beneath the sea is the Hyrule from the Nintendo 64's seminal adventure.

And if the magnitude of the task at hand wasn't palpable enough, it's a responsibility given extra weight thanks to the underwhelming support for the Wii U, as eyes turn to the green-capped Hero of Time to provide the killer app for which the uncultivated hardware has been waiting patiently.

To quote the man himself, overseeing the three projects has been "tough", with Aonuma citing the incredible efforts of his staff as fundamental to bringing the three different games to life simultaneously. But as **games™** talks to Aonuma, we find him to be refreshingly humble, a distinguished industry personality whose unyielding passion for his work steers him towards unknown challenges and opportunities constantly in pursuit of perfection. It's almost a hoary cliché to present a creative wracked with professional insecurities, but *Zelda*'s cyclical reinvention is indicative of Aonuma's mind-set, which persistently spurs him onward beyond his own personal expectations and desire to retire. "I always make these games with the thought that this is going to be my last," he explains to us. "However, every time we finish work on it, I always still have regrets, wishing that we could do this or that, and end up wanting to make another *Zelda* game. I guess that could come to a close if I finally make a perfect game, but perhaps I would not be able to create such a thing even if I spent my whole life on it. However, I know I won't be able to keep working as a developer forever, so I really would like to create something as close to perfection as possible not too far into the future and be able to retire with no regrets."



Aonuma delving back into Link's past with *The Legend Of Zelda: Wind Waker HD* almost appears like a reductive effort to craft the definitive *Zelda* title, but the truth is that the development has proven a crucial bridge for the producer in establishing the future of the series.

When something unexpected happens, the first reaction people have is to be wary," Aonuma diplomatically states when he addresses the prejudices levied at *Wind Waker*'s art style upon its initial unveiling for GameCube. "I try to make the games I work on unique. Not only in terms of gameplay, but also in terms of graphical style. I want the game to be unlike anything I've seen anywhere else. Changes to the graphics also help to change preconceived ideas and have a big impact on the gameplay. Because the graphical style can lead to uniqueness like that, I think it really can't be ignored."

Indeed, *Wind Waker* has always offered much beyond its dramatic shift to cel-shaded visuals that came as a disappointment to some. Peer beyond the endless white-crested waves, past its quaint islets that house its perilous dungeons, and below the depths of the ocean into the frozen Hyrule, and the sense of daring is omnipresent.

> "I always make these games with the thought that this is going to be my last"



Understanding The Zelda Canon

The Legend Of Zelda is known for its deeply intricate continuity and we've taking it upon ourselves here at **games™** to untangle this convoluted net



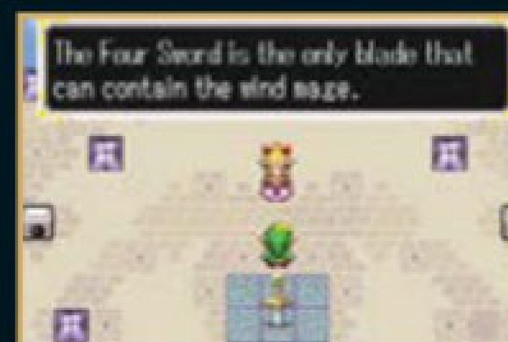
SKYWARD SWORD [WII]

The jumping off point for the series is also its most recent entry. Taking place generations after the creation of the world, *Skyward Sword* establishes the land of Hyrule below the clouds.

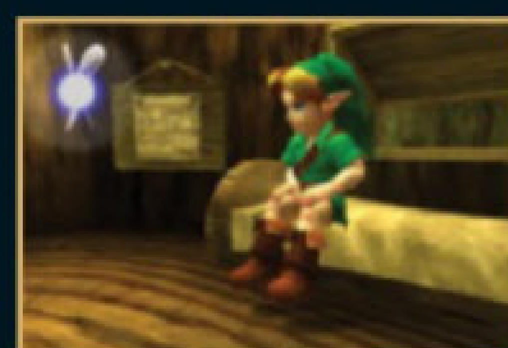


THE MINISH CAP [GBA]





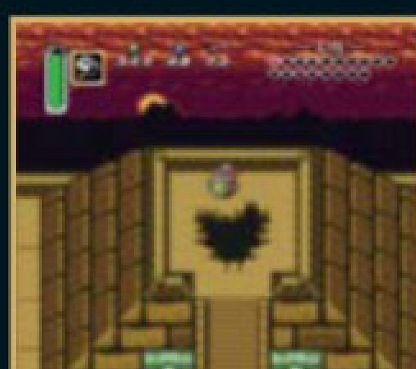
FOUR SWORDS [GBA]



OCARINA OF TIME [N64]

This is where things get complicated. Due to Link's time-jumping adventures in *Ocarina*, the timeline is split into three parallel universes after his final battle with Ganondorf.

TIMELINE A
THE HERO IS DEFEATED



A LINK TO THE PAST [SNES]

The first of five games set within the dark timeline following Link's failure to defeat Ganondorf and prevent him from acquiring the remaining Triforce pieces. Sealed in the Sacred Realm, which he corrupts into the Dark World. *A Link To The Past* takes place years later after Ganondorf returns to Hyrule.



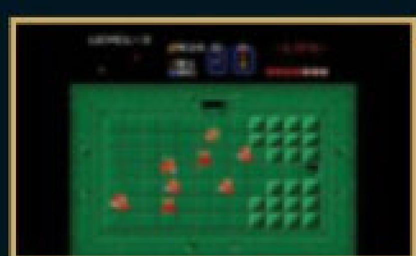
ORACLE OF AGES/ ORACLE OF SEASONS [GBC]



LINK'S AWAKENING [GB]

THE LEGEND OF ZELDA [NES]

The original game in the series is set late in the timeline, as Ganon is revived once again and seeks the power of the Triforce.



ZELDA II: THE ADVENTURE OF LINK [NES]

The timeline ends with the Triforce being reunited for the first time in years, preventing Ganon's return and restoring peace to Hyrule.



TIMELINE B
THE CHILD ERA



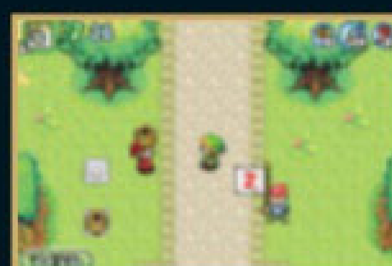
MAJORA'S MASK [N64]

After Link successfully defeats Ganondorf at the end of *Ocarina Of Time*, he is sent back to his original time when he was a child. After warning Princess Zelda and The King of Hyrule of Ganondorf's schemes, Link sets off on a journey to find Navi.



TWILIGHT PRINCESS [GC/WII]

Following Ganondorf's imprisonment, it's discovered he attained the Triforce of Power and so he's cast into the Twilight Realm. Ganon is killed in the final battle.



FOUR SWORDS ADVENTURES [GC]

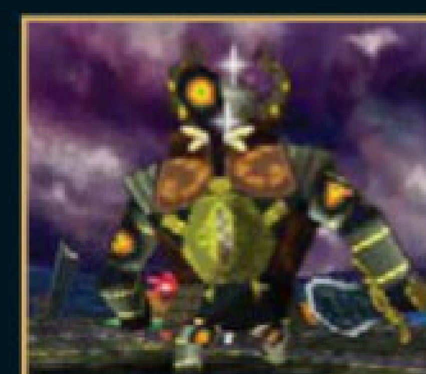
Ganon is reincarnated and intends to revive the sorcerer Vaati from his imprisonment within the Four Swords. Vaati is destroyed and Ganon is sealed within the Four Sword eternally.

TIMELINE C
THE ADULT ERA



THE WIND WAKER [GC]

Following the Hero of Time's victory, Ganondorf escapes and plunges Hyrule into darkness. The Golden Goddesses plunge Hyrule underwater, keeping them frozen in time. Ganon's schemes are once again thwarted, ending in Link and Zelda building a new Hyrule on the on the surface of the ocean.



PHANTOM HOURGLASS [DS]



SPIRIT TRACKS [DS]

The timeline ends with Link entering the Dark Realm and vanquishing Demon King Malladus, restoring Hyrule to peace once more.



This old *Zelda*, the one lying dormant at the bottom of the sea, is a mere echo of its past, a glimpse at all that had come before made invisible beneath the surface of its unconventional sandy shores, high-seas exploration and buccaneering adventure. All of which, quite ironically, would be made timeless through its controversial bobble-headed art style.

Aonuma doesn't express a huge amount of regret on the project, and the few modifications that Aonuma discusses appear seated in compunction, recalling aspects of Link's personality formed as a result of his own personal circumstances during that time. "We were working on *Wind Waker* right around the time that my son was born," he says. "Having just become a father, I wrote the text for the King of Red Lions, the talking boat who takes Link on his adventure, as if I was talking to my own son. Looking back over that text now, I felt as if he had a really self-important attitude and was forcing Link to go along with him. I regretted that a bit and changed the way he speaks to be a bit milder in the remake. So the King of Red Lions has also grown as a character thanks to this remake."

There's also another explanation for the HD makeover. In much the same way that nearly every new Zelda title has introduced a new interpretation of Link – one that exists within the same universe but born eons apart – so too has every Nintendo console. We're not referring to a completely new character (*The Phantom Hourglass* and *Spirit Tracks* on DS shared Wind Waker's Link, for example) but in terms of how the hardware has enabled developers to reinterpret the mechanics and design of the world. While that's still true today, the unfortunate rub is that protracted development times have limited how quickly Aonuma can bring a new adventure to the latest consoles. "As hardware improves, lots of things we couldn't do before become possible. Those are things that we ought to make use of in a brand new game on that hardware, but unfortunately it can take a while before a new game is ready to play. We decided to create the *Wind Waker HD* remake because we wanted users to be able to experience all the potential of the new hardware as soon as possible."

This almost suggests that *Wind Waker* acts as a trial run of sort for a *Zelda* proper on Wii U, and Aonuma points towards a few ideas that'll make the jump from the remake over to the console's first original *Zelda* game: "We are planning on using things like the Wii U GamePad user interface, how you can use the map like a GPS and the intuitive aiming using motion controls in the next *Zelda* game too. I'd also like to be able to bring the experience of being able to explore the Great Sea however you want to locations other than the sea."

An intriguing indication towards the future bearing of the series, but Aonuma laughs off the suggestion that it'll follow *Wind Waker* and adopt another radical leap into a new visual direction. "We encountered an awful lot of problems from the drastic leap we took with *Wind Waker*. I think we will be a bit more careful in future, but if we find a new approach that not just the developers, but also the users would enjoy then I think we will want to break new ground again. But we haven't found such an approach yet," he adds.

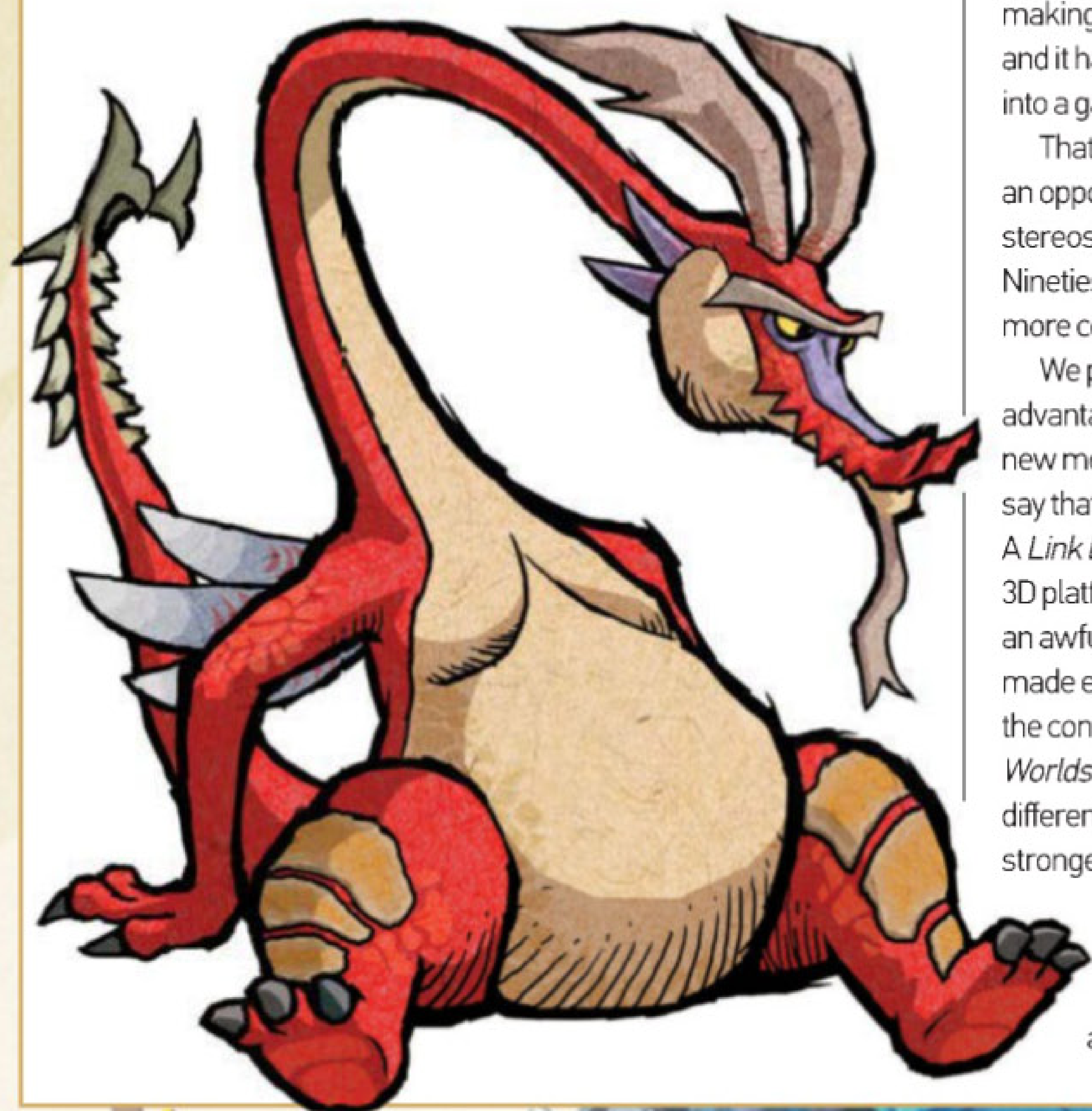
> "These games may feel a little different from the experiences you've had before and this will be a lot stronger in the new Zelda"

By the time *A Link To The Past* had been released in Japan back in 1991, Aonuma had just begun working at Nintendo under the tutelage of Shigeru Miyamoto. His contributions aren't of particular note, spending the majority of his time creating sprites for *Mario's Open Golf* among other NES titles. But the indelible impact *A Link To The Past* left on the young creator was unmistakable, manifesting itself years later in his first title *Marvelous: Another Treasure Island* – ostensibly a *Zelda* game in all but name.

"As *A Link To The Past* was what made me want to make games in the first place, it is a truly moving experience to be working on the sequel," Aonuma tells **games™** as conversation turns to the 3DS' *A Link Between Worlds*. A direct sequel to the influential SNES classic, the original didn't so much define the franchise – introducing such staples as the Master Sword and the multifarious nature of its canon – as it did define a genre. While gamers have often pointed towards *Ocarina Of Time* as the franchise zenith, *Zelda* purists will list 100 reasons why *A Link To The Past* is a far superior quest. Aonuma is only too aware of the pressure accompanying a sequel 22 years in the making. "I am worried about whether the fans are going to like it once it is released," he admits during our interview. "We did not start making this game on the notion that we were making the sequel, and it happened as a matter of course as we developed unique ideas into a game."

That shouldn't come as a huge surprise. Rather than just seize an opportunity to redress the exalted original's design in vibrant stereoscopic 3D graphics and trim a few of the clunky aspects of Nineties game design, it is a title sculpted in typical Aonuma fashion, more concerned with pushing forward than looking back.

We posit that the goal for the franchise has always been to take advantage of the most recent hardware, enabling him to generate new mechanics and gameplay opportunities. "You could even say that is the most important goal," he agrees. But in the case of *A Link Between Worlds*, it was about seizing the advantages of a 3D platform to make a two-dimensional title. While that sounds an awful lot like an oxymoron, Aonuma returns to a statement he made earlier in the year, asserting that he intends on rethinking the conventions of *Zelda*: "*Wind Waker HD* and *A Link Between Worlds* also give a little glimpse of this. These games may feel a little different from the experiences you've had before and this will be a lot stronger in the new *Zelda*."



It's hard not to take the statement with a pinch of salt. After all, the series has a predilection for resting on its predictable pattern of taxing dungeons, well-worn gadgets and hospitable communities inhabited by Gorons, Dekus and

That Wii U Demo

Nintendo revealed an early glimpse at what a *Zelda* sequel might possibly look like on the Wii U, during its 2011 E3 presentation. However, Aonuma has stated in recent interviews that the footage was only a demonstration of the graphical capabilities of Nintendo's new system. Unlike the *SpaceWorld* presentation back in 2000 – which presented a realistically rendered real-time duel between Link and Ganondorf – that lead many to believe the title that would become *Wind Waker* would be a gritty incarnation, don't expect the Wii U's first original *Zelda* title to stray from the art direction of the previous two mainline console entries.

It's hard to imagine a *Zelda* title ever courting controversy, but the decision to adopt cel-shaded visuals was met by a divisive response by some fans.



The Wii U GamePad is used as a map and an inventory, a feature that Aonuma confirms will be returning in *Zelda*'s first original title on Nintendo's new console.

Zoras. Establishing an equilibrium between old and new – while earning a few detractors along the way – has long been as intrinsic to the *Zelda* legacy as Link's mossy-hued tunic. But given the pioneering nature of the original, *A Link Between Worlds* is laboured with a greater expectation to innovate rather than retread old ground.

Much attention has been focused on Link's newfound ability to transplant himself onto walls as a drawing, slipping between the Light and Dark World. There has also been talk of rupees (the in-game currency) playing a more significant role – in the past they have been used to buy access to areas of the overworld, or in one case to limit ammunition. Aonuma is reticent to be drawn into specifics, and his modesty comes to the fore once again as we discuss the influential nature of the original and the impact he expects the sequel will have: "If we are talking about being influential on the players, I would be happy if it has a good effect on people, especially if it affects them positively in their lives outside of gaming," he says. "However, I am not making games with this point in mind in particular. If we are talking about being influential on other game titles, I would like the series to continue to live up to the other games."

There's an argument to be made, given his earlier statement about taking advantage of the latest hardware, that every *Legend* is only as good as its console. This would place the current trio of upcoming releases in a somewhat awkward snapshot »

10 Things You Didn't Know About The Legend Of Zelda



LINK TO THE PAST'S HIDDEN ROOM

One lucky winner of a Nintendo competition managed to get his name implemented inside a hidden room within the game. Unfortunately, it's only accessible if you hack the game and all it contains is a plaque that reads, 'My name is Chris Houlihan. This is my top secret room. Keep it between us, OK?'



A LOST JUMP BUTTON

During the development of the first 3D *Zelda*, Nintendo implemented a jump button, similar to *Super Mario 64*. It was removed and replaced with an auto-jump mechanic to streamline exploration and puzzle solving.





OCARINA OF TIME WAS NEARLY FIRST-PERSON

At one point it was envisioned that the majority of the game would be framed from a first-person perspective, with combat encounters switching to a side mechanic.

LINK'S AWAKENING WAS CENSORED

An odd spot of censorship in the US version of *Link's Awakening* involved a hippo posing as a live model for an artist. In the Japanese version she conceals her breasts with a sheet, but the US version removes both to create, well, a completely nude but breastless hippo.



LINK'S AWAKENING IS BASED ON A NON-ZELDA GAME

There's a reason *Link's Awakening* feels at odds with the rest of the series. It's more of a spiritual sequel to a little-known, Japan-only title, *The Frog For Whom The Bell Tolls*.

ORIGINAL GAME MAPS SPELL ZELDA

This one is rather self-explanatory. When lined up, five of the dungeon maps in the second quest mode spell out the word "Zelda".



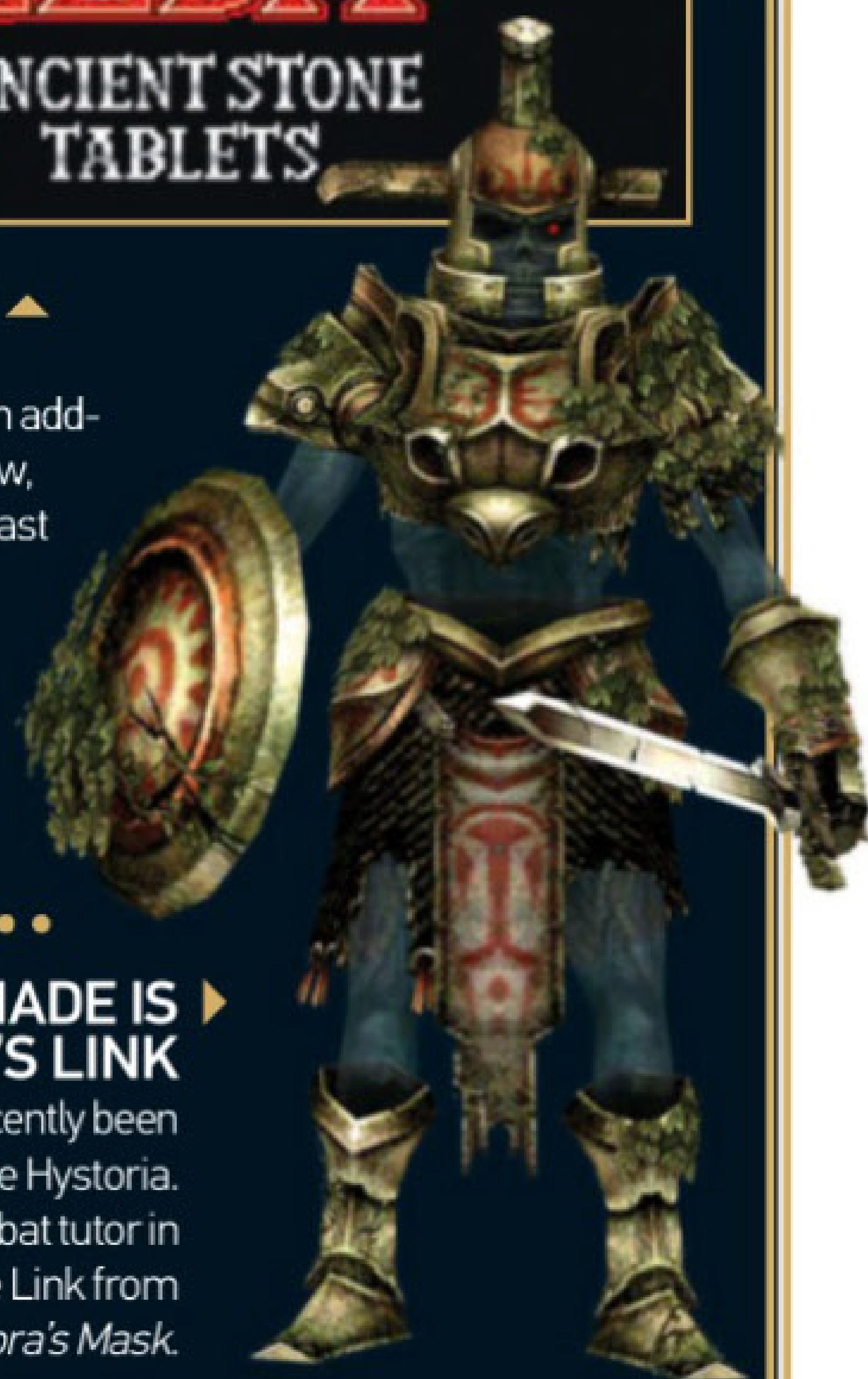


TOTAKA'S SONG

Composer Kazumi Totaka is notorious for hiding a 19-note tune within the majority of videogames he works on and *The Legend Of Zelda: Link's Awakening* is no different. It can be heard if you stands in Richard's villa for two minutes and 30 seconds

THE FORGOTTEN GAMES

In Japan the SNES boasted an add-on peripheral titled Satellaview, enabling games to be broadcast to the living room. Two new *Zelda* titles emerged: *The Ancient Stone Tablets* and *Triforce Of The Gods*. A 16-bit remake of the original *Zelda* was also broadcast.



ZELDA ORIGINS

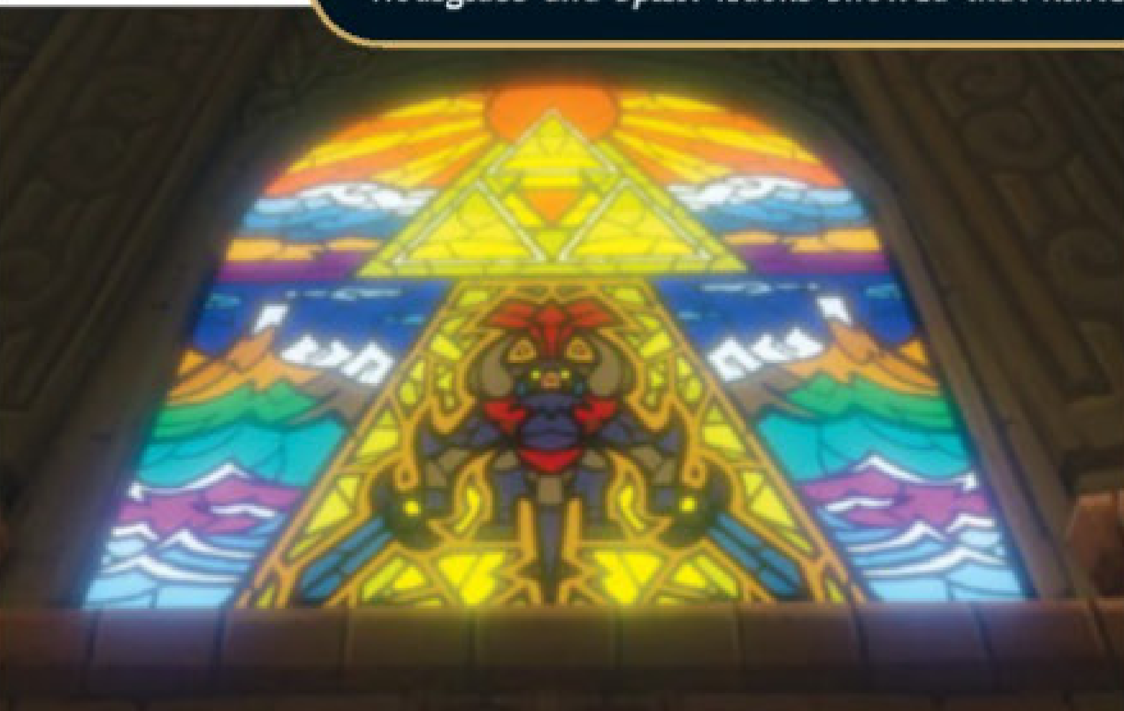
Shigeru Miyamoto has stated that Princess Zelda is named after Zelda Fitzgerald, wife of F. Scott Fitzgerald (author of *The Great Gatsby*).

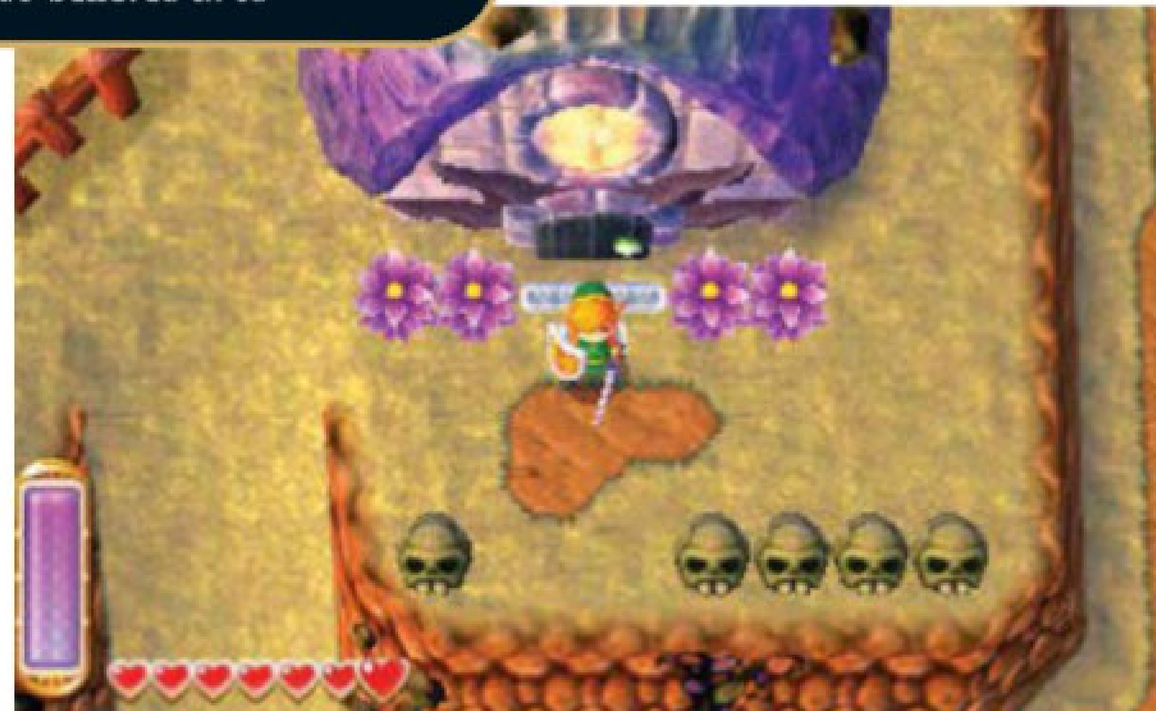
HERO'S SHADE IS OCARINA'S LINK

One *Zelda* mystery has recently been resolved thanks to the Hyrule Hystoria. Hero's Shade, the skeletal combat tutor in *Twilight Princess*, is in fact the Link from *Ocarina Of Time* and *Majora's Mask*.



While *Wind Waker*'s art direction wasn't perceived as popular around the time it was unveiled, the use of the same style in *The Minish Cap*, *Phantom Hourglass* and *Spirit Tracks* showed that Nintendo believed in it









There's a lot of expectation on the next *Zelda* game to reignite interest in Nintendo's ailing console.

"The time I have spent working with [Miyamoto-san] is even longer than my relationship with my father, so I really should be able to read his mind by now"

within *Zelda*'s complexly woven tapestry given that, aside from a graphical bump, the base functionality for both the 3DS and Wii U hinges similarly on dual-screen play. This is where the process of managing three games simultaneously proved advantageous. It was through the process of switching between multiple projects that one title's faults became the impetus to resolve a setback within another. "I cannot talk of this in detail, but we frequently find solutions to a problem in one title when working on another," he says. "When you focus too much on one title, you are prone to take a very narrow minded approach and I guess you could say working on other titles widens your perspective.

"The sense of a job well done I get as a result of all these efforts makes me truly happy. Also, when you are working on a number of titles at once you can share information about what works well or



badly between the teams. This helps improve the quality of each of the games so there are lots of good things about working like this. The downside is that even when work on one game is over there is still another one there, so I never get a break. My family isn't so pleased about that. It's quite a challenge trying to keep them happy," he says.

It'll come as some relief to his home life then that Aonuma is whittling down his workload from three games to one. Still, what he's left with is arguably his biggest challenge to date. The next *Zelda* title is heading to Wii U in the next couple of years and will, by all accounts, renew faith in the timeless fable, reinvigorating the world once again with a fresh perspective.

For Aonuma, the opportunity to regenerate the series' conventions continues to stoke his fire, sharpen his sword and spur him onwards into a new era of *Zelda*. "There are no limitations on what kind of place Hyrule can be, other than that it is a country where Zelda exists as its princess," he says on the artistic versatility of the universe. "We now have many titles in the series, so we are seeing characters and location names from previous titles coming up again. We are using these when it adds to the fun, but there is no rule that we have to use these at all. We may even need to change things you might take for granted like Zelda being a princess. I would really like the next Hyrule to be a setting no one has ever imagined before."

It's a deliberate tease from the equivocal helmsman, who has no doubt already vividly conceived *The Legend Of Zelda*'s first original high-definition adventure. Building the next elaborately crafted overworld is just one step on a long road, and as Nintendo continues to gravitate away from traditional controllers, fans are looking to Aonuma to fully expose the potential of the Wii U. He admits that this has raised a few issues during development: "Although there may be technical difficulties, we rarely let that be a reason to avoid adding things to the game. In *Skyward Sword*, it was a technical challenge to make Link's sword swings match the motion controls completely and I was a little worried whether the users would be happy about this innovation. Enthusiast gamers often have strong attachments to traditional controls, but I believed that in the end many users would enjoy the unique gameplay and we went ahead with it."

Aonuma's focus is resolute. We attempt to launch into topics of conversation that threaten to divert attention away from his specificities of his work (What does Zelda represent to Nintendo?), which is met by an uncharacteristically evasive response ("I don't know. I have never really thought about such a complicated topic…"), even encroaching on the bizarre when he discusses what inspires him ("If anything, maybe the hobby that I have recently started has had an influence, but that hobby is a secret to everybody.")


There's no point in prodding Aonuma for further details. He's deeply reserved, but we wouldn't want it any other way. *The Legend Of Zelda*'s continued capacity to surprise is an astonishing feat for a series launched by Shigeru Miyamoto 27 years ago. And perhaps the most unexpected revelation is one left until last. After 15 years either producing or directing every entry in the franchise, Aonuma – one of Nintendo's most venerated designers – still finds himself in awe of his mentor, Miyamoto. "The time I have spent working with him is even longer than my relationship with my father, so I really should be able to read his mind by now," he says. "I am still surprised by his opinions, and I am far away from reaching Mr Miyamoto's level of perspective. When you get to my age, the number of people pointing out your faults become quite limited. So in this sense too, I would like him to forever give opinions on the products that we create."

The Legend Of Zelda: The Wind Waker HD is out now on Wii U, *A Link Between Worlds* arrives November on 3DS.



> "It made me want to make The Witcher 3 a similarly emotionally engaging experience"
>
> JAKUB SZAMALEK, CD PROJEKT RED





WHY I ♥...

Final Fantasy X

JAKUB SZAMALEK, CD PROJEKT RED

There are many games I love and a lot of it depends on what age I was at the time. I have quite a peculiar taste when it comes to games. But when it comes to roleplaying games, apart from The Witcher, *I really like Japanese titles in that genre.* Final Fantasy X *was a game I look back on now for inspiration, it made me want to make* The Witcher 3 *a similarly emotionally engaging experience. The game was very good at evoking emotions. Of course, it was completely linear, but there were some places where I almost shed a tear. This is definitely something that I would like to achieve in my work. I like games that evoke emotions, like* Shadow Of The Colossus, *which wasn't really about dialogue but about emotions.* Final Fantasy X *was a real inspiration in that regard.*

"There's always something just on the horizon enticing you to go over there and explore it"

ANDREAS GSCHWARI, AVALANCHE STUDIOS

Avalanche listened to the feedback from fans following the E3 unveiling, and switched the American voice actor with an Australian one.

Mad Max

CONCEPT ■ Avalanche Studios puts its chaotic spin on the open world to reinterpret the Mel Gibson-starring Seventies action franchise.

It's OK, he's Australian again now

The thought of *Mad Max*, Mel Gibson's breakout Seventies post-apocalyptic vehicle, roaring onto consoles as a full-bodied triple-A title is so outlandish and unexpected that the infamous Hollywood figure could have been at the helm himself. However, that particular honour belongs to Avalanche Studios, who has lifted the framework from its open-world *Just Cause* series and dropped it into the bleak wasteland of the iconic film franchise.

"We like to go over-the-top, but with this franchise we have to be grounded," Andreas Gschwari, lead level designer, tells **games™** during an extended gameplay demonstration. "It's not always easy. As developers we have a tendency to go overboard. We play the game constantly, and we try to ask the question, 'Is this something that makes sense in the universe?' We try to find that balance, but overall it has to be grounded."

Certainly, Avalanche's definition of grounded is very different to most other developers (unless Gschwari is being literal – you won't find Max grappling onto a passing helicopter before freefalling back to Earth). Max's ruthless pursuit to assemble a new automobile – following an incident that leaves him for dead in the desert and robs him of his iconic car, the Interceptor – thrusts the beleaguered road warrior into taut scenarios that inevitably lead to high-octane histrionics. A car chase that starts with a few exchanged bullets escalates into a volley of incendiary weaponry, vehicles replying to gunfire with flame-spewing exhausts and precision shotgun blasts ignite naked gas canisters. *Arma 3* this is not.

As you might expect, this is just the tip of the iceberg. In a clear nod to the studio's heritage, a harpoon gun wielded by Chumbucket – the mechanical savant that accompanies Max during specific missions – can be used to tear down fortress barriers, fishhook other survivors and drag less opposing vehicles across the dustland.

/// Gschwari details the studio's approach to vehicular combat, principally with both versatility and accessibility in mind. "When you use something like the shotgun or harpoon gun in vehicular combat, you've got two modes," he continues to explain. "You've got a quick mode: where it will lock on to the nearest target – we have several weak spots on every vehicle. The other is aim mode, and it's completely free. You can basically cycle through all these points and, depending on the size of the car, there can be a lot of them. That's why we take you into the slo-mo style so you get these really cool moments and the time to really be specific: 'Okay, I want to pull off this door with the harpoon, and then go alongside him and shoot the driver.'"

By all accounts, *Mad Max* will pivot around driving. After all, Max's journey is jump-started by the loss of his Interceptor, forcing him to scavenge the barren landscape for spare parts to construct an even brawnier vehicle that he labels 'Magnum Opus'. Not so, according to Gschwari, stating that the gameplay is split "50/50. Half car, half on-foot." To demonstrate, he takes Max out of the driving seat and furtively approaches a nearby enemy stronghold. These makeshift forts are scattered across the sand-washed planes of the wasteland, each creatively formed in the remnants of derelict structures. This particular one is housed within the rusting carcass of a hollowed-out aeroplane fuselage. Max picks off one patrolling guard with a sniper rifle, but we're told that the gameplay won't weigh much emphasis on firearms. "We made a decision very early in development to stay away from overusing our weapons," Gschwari says. "We've done it in the past, so we wanted to try something new, but also because it didn't feel like it fit that well. Max obviously has a shotgun, and there's a sniper rifle in the back of the car, because those are, like, the only two weapons that use bullets it has allowed us to use that as an economy. Bullets are scarce, so you have to scavenge for them."

Melee combat, then, had to look and feel both refined and distinctive. The foundations of this system rely on a simple attack, block and counter system (similar to – what else – the *Arkham* series), but animations are savage – Max at one point punts a Thunderstick

INFORMATION

Details

Format: PC, PlayStation 3, PlayStation 4, Xbox 360, Xbox One
Origin: Sweden
Publisher: Warner Bros. Interactive
Developer: Avalanche Studios
Release: 2014
Genre: Action-Adventure
Players: 1

Developer Profile

Just Cause catapulted this modest Swedish studio from obscurity into mainstream recognition. It has been busy working on several projects since the download-only *Renegade Ops* in 2011. *Mad Max* was announced earlier in the year, while two yet-to-be-announced titles are said to be in the pipeline.

Developer History

Renegade Ops **2011 [Multi]**
Just Cause 2 **2010 [Multi]**
The Hunter **2009 [PC]**
Just Cause **2006 [Multi]**

High Point

Just Cause 2 broadened the canvas of the original and imbued its exotic locale with a gratifying sense of anarchy.



(a grenade-like weapon) into an enemy, unleashing a shower of viscera – lending combat a ferocious edge. "[We had to] make sure we had a refined combat system, because it features so heavily," explains Gschwari, before highlighting our earlier comparison to Rocksteady's take on the Caped Crusader. "We are fans of the *Arkham* franchise, and there's obviously other games as well that we learned from. We learned what looks good, what works good and how players like to interact. We're gamers ourselves, so we know what we like in close combat, and it's all about that. We've got an amazing hand-to-hand combat team. That's all they do; they play these games and love making them, so they know exactly what they're doing."

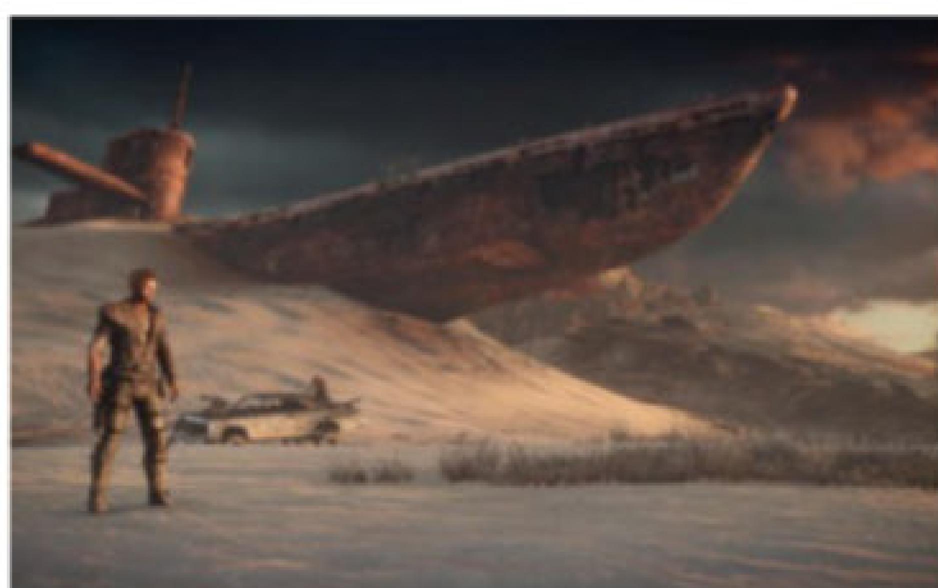
What all of this feeds into is a crucial sense of freedom, enabling players to traverse the wilderness however they want, constantly pushing the limits of the world further to make the most out of it. It's a design philosophy that is so deeply ingrained in the Avalanche DNA that anything less would be a compromise. Yet, with *Just Cause 2*, Avalanche had the luxury of building its own island, one richly populated with enticing objects, teasing structures and enough playful distractions to not only enrich the setting, but also make sure its audience was captivated. The *Mad Max* franchise doesn't exactly boast a wealth of environmental iconography – the Thunderdome was essentially a children's playground apparatus. We found ourselves scanning the scenery during our demonstration for signs of life, scouting out possible landmarks, but ended up at a loss in what is, quite aptly, a genuine wasteland. It's hard to imagine a wealth of involving locales across this endless sea of sand, and it's a point that we raise with Gschwari, who admits to the difficulty in striking the right balance when populating the post-apocalyptic landscape. "We create what we think is a fun gameplay experience, and then we create gameplay density. We want to make sure the player always has something to do. So there's always something just on the horizon enticing you to go over there and explore it," he says, pointing out some flaming smokestacks that are hiding just beyond a dune. "So you go into an enemy base, you deal with the opposition there and you take the resources. We make sure that we create a density where you can just see another camp in the distance. Once we get that right it won't feel too empty; it won't feel too full. We don't want players to search too long, but we also don't want them to stumble into the next area."

/// His answer raises a couple of other points about scale. We ask how the world map compares to the gargantuan playing field of *Just Cause 2*, and what the studio is doing to persuade players to return to an area once it has been stripped of its resources. "At Avalanche, we don't really determine the size until very close 'til we're done," is Gschwari's surprising response to the first point. "The way we build our games is an organic process. We build from the inner core outwards and build the land around it as we need it." As for players returning to cleared areas of the map, he's a little more elusive. "We're not revealing too much about different enemy types and unlocks we have. But if you use the harpoon, for example, there may be a gate that can only be accessed by an upgraded harpoon gun. Some of the larger size camps will have areas you can't access when you first find it. You might notice a big stockpile of resources there that you'll have to come back to get," he suggests.

> "We like to go over-the-top but with this franchise we have to be grounded"
>
> ANDREAS GSCHWARI, AVALANCHE STUDIOS

Finally, we discuss the decision to revitalise George Miller's cult franchise for contemporary gamers, and whether the character is still relevant. "The franchise is as valid today as it was 30 years ago," enthuses Gschwari. "*Mad Max* was the granddaddy of all post-apocalyptic franchises. A lot of games and movies have looked at *Mad Max* as a reference – as a milestone in post-apocalyptic fiction. Young generations might not be aware of it, but that's where we come in as a developer to educate them.

"Yes, it is a franchise, it's a universe, but that's not all it is," he concludes. "*Mad Max* isn't just the movies; it's an idea, a concept. A concept of civilisation fallen apart and mankind descending into a tribal society. For me, that goes beyond the movie. That goes beyond any one single product."





Above: A lot of the scenery appears to be destructible. Max takes a direct approach to one enemy stronghold, driving straight through its outer walls and into the centre of the gang's hideout. Avalanche pointed out to **games™** that not all structures will be quite so vulnerable. Right: There are side missions that Max can undertake to scavenge further resources. We're told a clean-up crew takes care of all the scattered debris that Max leaves in his wake.



Above: Max can't rely on firearms, with bullets a rare commodity. However, that's not to say he won't have a few gadgets to help him out.

RETURN TO OZ

MAD MAX received a positive reception at its E3 unveiling earlier in the year. However, fans took exception with the titular character's American accent (as the character is traditionally Australian). One deafening outcry from the community and a survey later, the studio decided to rectify the issue. "Whenever you make a game there's always some things that… you think you're doing everything right," says lead level designer Andreas Gschwari. "We play the game every day and we hear the voice everyday, so for us it was natural. We were happy to listen to our fans and change the voice accordingly. In the grand scheme of things it's not a big ask. If we have this many dedicated fans this early in development, who are we to say no to them?"





■ Above: There's an extensive range of customisation options for Max's Magnum Opus. Choosing the right upgrades will affect the car's performance both positively and negatively. Below: We're told that Chumbucket won't assist Max throughout the entirety of the game, just specific missions.





A JUST CAUSE FOR MULTIPLAYER?

THE JUST CAUSE community has taken pleasure in modding the sequel, with a user-made multiplayer appendage becoming popular on PC. **games™** puts it to the studio whether it has inspired the development team to implement a similar mode: "With *Mad Max* we want to tell a more serious story, a deeper story," says Gschwari. "At the end of the day, the world itself is an open-world sandbox. If people go out and have fun and do weird and wonderful things, that's the highest compliment we can get." Does that mean there's no studio-developed multiplayer? "As a studio we're always looking to push boundaries and introduce new elements, but *Mad Max* is going to be single-player alone."

Thief

CONCEPT ■ A sneak-'em-up in the classic sense. *Thief* utilises thievery, archery and general bastardly behaviour as players fight to survive on the mean streets of The City.

Eidos Montreal details the narrative underpinning Garrett's long-awaited return

INFORMATION

Details

Format: PC, PlayStation 3, PlayStation 4, Xbox 360, Xbox One
Origin: Canada
Publisher: Square Enix
Developer: Eidos Montreal
Release: 28 February
Players: 1

Developer Profile

Located in a building titled Le Gordon Brown (for reasons no one at the studio is quite sure about), Eidos Montreal has become a dab hand at rejuvenating dormant IP for contemporary gamers. *Deus Ex: Human Revolution* was the studio's debut title, but it also slotted together *Tomb Raider*'s decent multiplayer and launched a *Deus Ex* iOS spin-off earlier in the year.

Developer History

Deus Ex: The Fall **2013 [Mob]**
Tomb Raider (Multiplayer) **2013 [Multi]**
Deus Ex: Human Revolution **2011 [Multi]**

High Point

Deus Ex was a sharp cyberpunk noir every bit as rich and detailed as its progenitor. Albeit a little rough around the edges, it was nonetheless an accomplished debut.

D*eus Ex: Human Revolution* had a few missteps – not least its outsourced boss battles – but what garnered such widespread acclaim was how it drew themes of transhumanism and conspiracy from its own mythology and reinterpreted them for a modern audience. Now Eidos Montreal is at it again, this time reaching back into the *Thief* franchise and dropping the taciturn Garrett onto a vast gothic canvas, this time haunted by his relationship with a former apprentice. **games™** chats to narrative director Steven Gallagher about reimagining the world of *Thief*.

What were the challenges in adapting the original games, and making this version relevant for a modern audience?

From a storytelling point of view, something we decided to go with that wasn't done in the earlier games as much was to try and get to the personal level. When I first sat down [I was] asking myself who [Garrett] was, what he was good at? There was actually very little to work with. He didn't talk, he didn't socialise, there's no real room for improvement. I had to chip away to find his vulnerability, and the danger of that is that you start to compromise a beautiful, mysterious character. You don't want to peel him back too much because you want him to preserve that. Which is why it's interesting for him to appear with this mentor relationship, where you want to give something to somebody else because you recognise something of yourself in them. But then that relationship going awry like that creates this wonderful opportunity to look at that person in the mirror and question who you are.

Have you changed the character of Garrett significantly from the original games, then?

Well, there's a certain legacy to Garrett. We know the old games existed, we played the old games during concept but we decided

> "We decided very quickly that we wanted a new story. We wanted a new Garrett"
> STEVEN GALLAGHER, EIDOS MONTREAL

■ While different factions are vying for control of The City, Garrett has his own motivations and doesn't align himself with any side of the conflict.

■ Recalling The Cradle from *Deadly Shadows*, *Thief* must retain some horror.

very quickly that we wanted a new story. We wanted a new Garrett. One thing we wanted to bring with us, though, was the context and premise of his personality. The concept of the lone wolf; he's quite selfish, he's arrogant and he doesn't need anybody to defend him. And what was interesting is when we started to think of what his conflict was, what his curve was. He's the master thief. What we decided to explore with the conflicts he has to resolve, and this relationship he has with his protégé, this younger girl, where she loses her life because of something he did, this is where his personal story begins.

Would you say that there's a supernatural element to *Thief*?

Yeah, you could use the word supernatural. Even in our modern world we have a lot of things we haven't explained yet. That's where the mystery starts coming in. Though I think in the world of Thief we didn't want to have an overtly magical universe. We didn't want, for want of a better expression, the 'hard edge' fantasy, the *Game Of Thrones* kind of thing. There is a lot of mystery; there are a lot of things that the characters don't understand. There's something happening where Garrett has the opportunity to peel back all these mysteries and see the layers of what's happening.

Is it more difficult to reboot or reimagine a previously successful game franchise than it is to come up with a new IP?

I think it's always difficult to successfully establish something like this. I think if it's an established IP, you obviously need to treat it with a certain amount of respect while rejuvenating it as well. It's a fine line to walk. Do you stay completely true to the original? Well, then you've just re-made the original, and what was the point? That's versus changing it so much to the point where people want a different name on it. It's that balance.

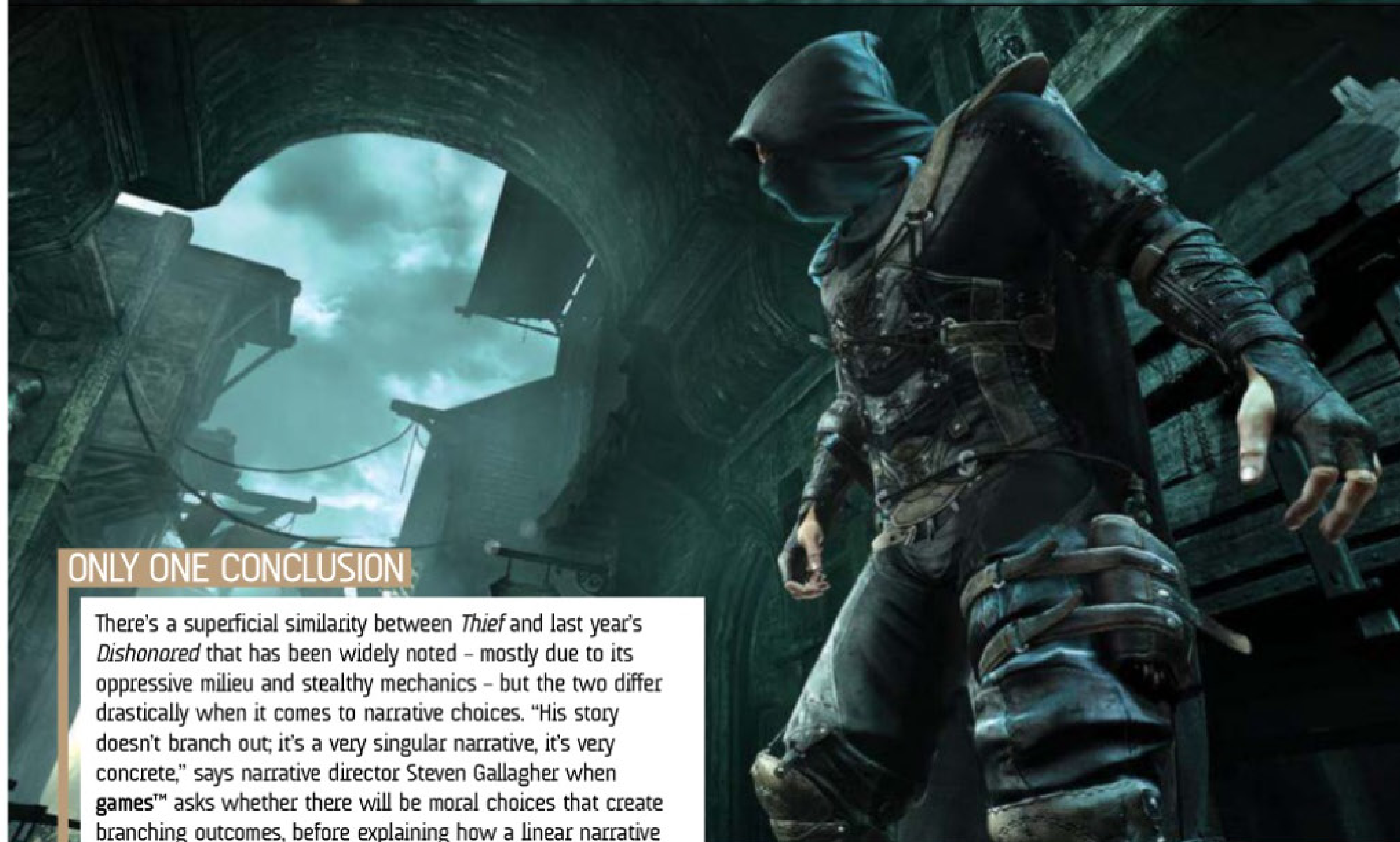
In terms of the next gen, do you feel new hardware offers more opportunities in terms of storytelling avenues?

From my point of view, most of my energy goes into world-building, keeping things cohesive, editing with the writers. It's got to really connect with me and I need to remember it. Technology, I suppose, is all about boundaries. Do I *need* technology to tell a good story? Not absolutely… Conversely, does it hurt me? No! It's awesome! It means I can have more things to say, fewer problems about budgetary concerns, I can get more information in there. Now we can build. We give you this city to explore, to touch, to go to, to connect with.



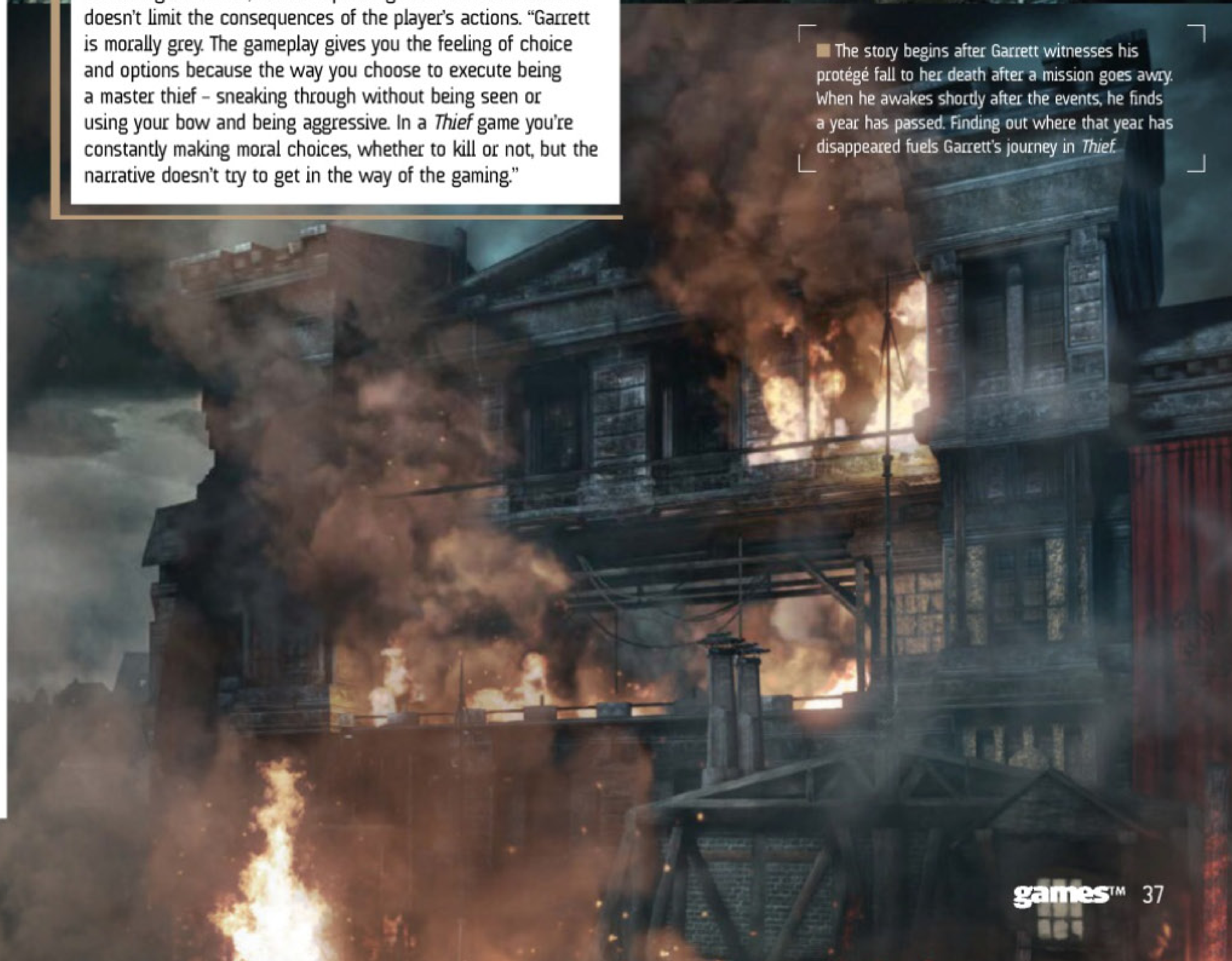


Asked whether this Garrett is still recognisable to fans of the previous games, Gallagher is emphatic in his response, stating "the wry, dry, cynical observations," of Garrett return. "He's very eccentric, very independent. He doesn't trust anyone," he adds.



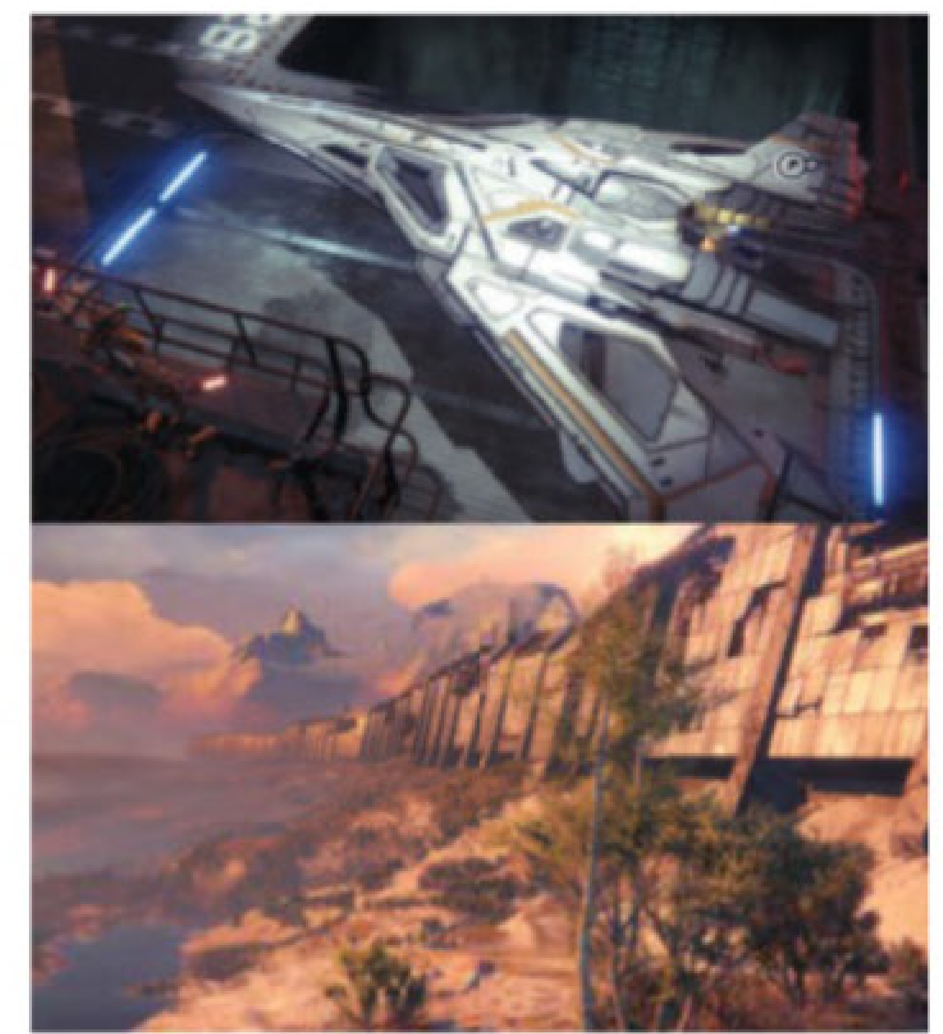
ONLY ONE CONCLUSION

There's a superficial similarity between *Thief* and last year's *Dishonored* that has been widely noted – mostly due to its oppressive milieu and stealthy mechanics – but the two differ drastically when it comes to narrative choices. "His story doesn't branch out; it's a very singular narrative, it's very concrete," says narrative director Steven Gallagher when **games**™ asks whether there will be moral choices that create branching outcomes, before explaining how a linear narrative doesn't limit the consequences of the player's actions. "Garrett is morally grey. The gameplay gives you the feeling of choice and options because the way you choose to execute being a master thief – sneaking through without being seen or using your bow and being aggressive. In a *Thief* game you're constantly making moral choices, whether to kill or not, but the narrative doesn't try to get in the way of the gaming."



The story begins after Garrett witnesses his protégé fall to her death after a mission goes awry. When he awakes shortly after the events, he finds a year has passed. Finding out where that year has disappeared fuels Garrett's journey in *Thief*.





Above: We've not seen a huge amount of *Destiny*'s environments, but we're told that players will be able to explore Earth, Venus, Mars and the Moon.

Destiny

CONCEPT An epic first-person-shooter-slash-MMO hybrid, *Destiny* launches players into a series of conflicts across space.

Bungie talks to games™ about the studio's evolution

"A lot of the best stories that came out of *Halo* were out of friends playing those games together, and the friendships and experiences that they would create," states David 'DeeJ' Dague, community manager on Bungie's upcoming *Destiny*. "This is something that the developers and creators at Bungie had always envisioned: a world that you could not only explore, but share with your friends, with chance encounters with other groups of people who are doing the same things."

games™ can't help but regard Deej's role as the most unenviable job on the development team, assuaging the Bungie loyalists' insatiable appetite for information, and tempering the occasional vociferous outburst. But as conversation turns towards *Destiny*'s bespoke features, it's clear that Bungie's mass following has had an indelible impact on the title's development. Specifically, Deej highlights how weapons are more than just facilitators of death, with each firearm embedded with a visually clear narrative to convey the travels and accomplishments of each player.

"Bungie has always loved to push the boundaries of the first-person shooter" DAVID 'DEEJ' DAGUE, BUNGIE

"The weapons are on display throughout the game. These weapons all tell their own stories. They have names and reputations, like swords of legend," Deej says. "When you look at somebody carrying a rifle, and you're aware of the story, you can instantly tell at a glance where they've been, what they've accomplished, what sort of games modes they like to play and so on. When people notice things about one another's loadouts they will say, 'Where did you get that?' and that becomes the catalyst for, 'Come along in my game so I too can benefit from those sorts of rewards.'"

No surprise then that *Destiny* crams in more weapons than any other Bungie game to date, not to mention implementing a slew of abilities (the majority of which revealed to date seem to be explosion-based) that further differentiates it from that seminal sci-fi series it spent years expanding. But even without acknowledging *Halo* directly, Deej admits that *Destiny* marks a clear progression for the studio after a decade spawning Master Chief into new conflicts. "It's a very ambitious project," says Deej. "It's a larger game than we've ever made. We've really got our work cut out for us, but we've been building an amazing team full of top talent from every discipline and corner of the entertainment industry. They've been using all of their gifts to make this game as awesome as it can possibly be.

"Bungie has always loved to push the boundaries of the first-person shooter," he concludes. "A lot of the work that we did on previous releases made those experiences more accessible to wider audiences and changed the way people related to shooters in general. *Destiny* seems to be the next logical step in our evolution as a developer."





Above: *Destiny* implements a three-weapon system, allowing a primary assault rifle, a special weapon (shotgun or sniper rifle) and a heavy weapon to be carried at once.

INFORMATION

Details

Format: PlayStation 3, PlayStation 4, Xbox 360, Xbox One
Origin: US
Publisher: Activision
Developer: Bungie
Release: 2014
Genre: MMOFPS
Players: Massively Multiplayer

Developer Profile

While predominantly known for its work on the *Halo* franchise, the studio has actually been around since 1991. It created both *Myth* and *Marathon* – two extremely popular franchises – before Microsoft acquired the company in 2000 and set it to work on the Xbox's defining title, *Halo*.

Developer History

Halo: Reach
2010 [Xbox 360]

Halo: Combat Evolved
2001 [Xbox 360, PC]

Myth: The Fallen Lords
1997 [PC]

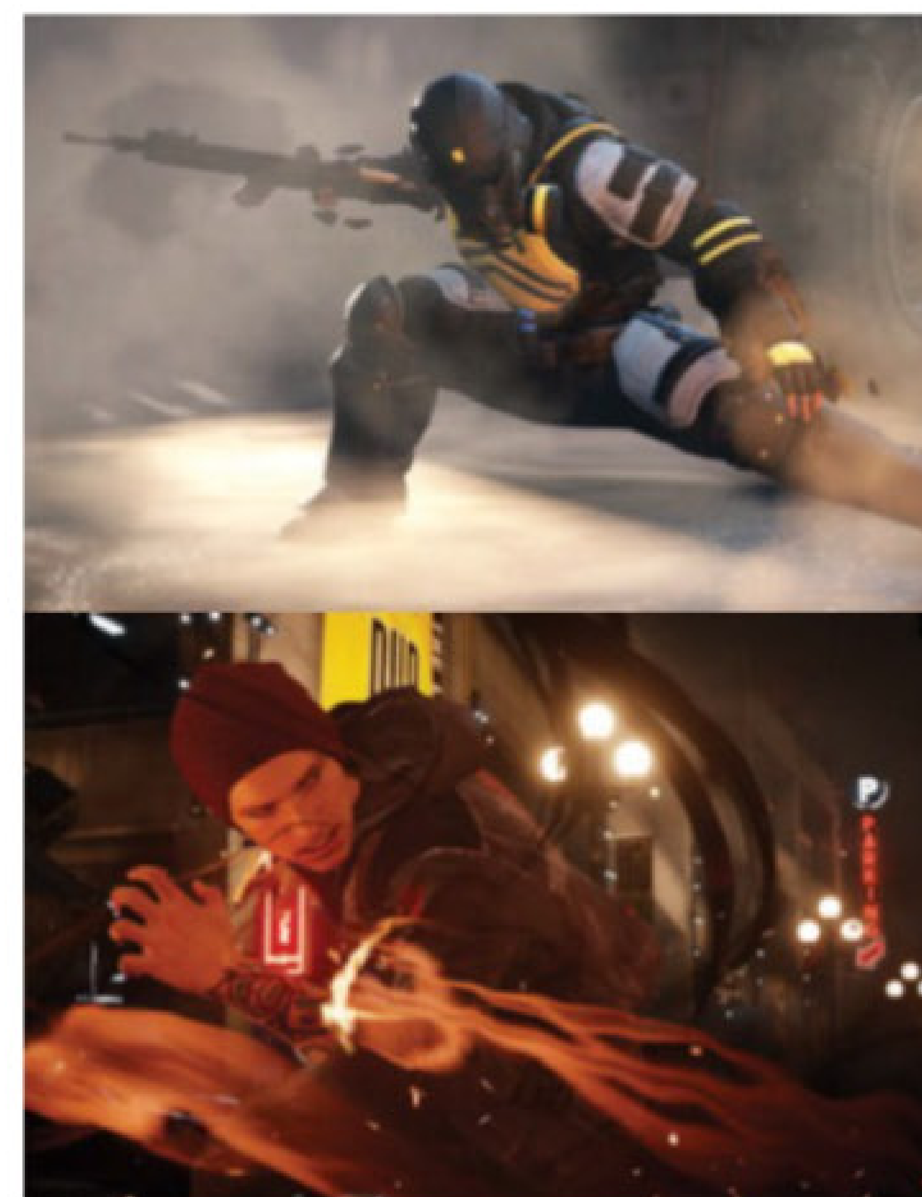
Marathon
1994 [Mac]

High Point

The original *Halo* remains to this day a bold, vast and kinetic first-person shooter that accomplished more than any other console FPS before it.

"As you find more and more superhumans and take their powers, you get a very different play experience"

NATE FOX SUCKER PUNCH



Once again *InFamous* proves that it's seemingly beyond Sucker Punch's abilities to create a likeable protagonist.

InFamous: Second Son

CONCEPT ■ Some beanie-wearing hipster inherits a bunch of wispy super-abilities that players can utilise to smash the life out of government lackeys just doing their job.

Sucker Punch's sequel looks so good we're prepared to tolerate its hero

It's perhaps a wise decision on Sucker Punch's part that *Infamous: Second Son* shares few surface-level similarities with the two titles that came before it. A new protagonist, a fresh setting and a more varied assortment of superhuman abilities all suggest that the developer has acknowledged the series' detractors and approached *Second Son* as an opportunity to deliver on the unfulfilled promises of the past.

Indeed, watching Delsin Rowe – the cocksure antihero sure to inspire antipathy from players – immolate a group of soldiers, teleporting around the environment in a wisp of smoke and rattling off a combination of melee and ranged attacks points towards a more acrobatic, agile approach to combat than the series is known for. It lacks the intense mechanical depth associated with the most confident examples of hack-and-slash titles, but it's easy to glean some influence from the genre mastered by Eastern developers.

Indicative of this refined approach is the simplification of the aiming system. A permanent on-screen reticule removes the need for precision aiming, enabling players maintain the flow of combat and fire freely at targets while navigating the environment – adding further emphasis to its fresh alacritous approach and the series' parkour gameplay.



Delsin has a chain that he uses to whip enemies. Well, when he's not horrifically setting their bodies on fire.

INFORMATION

Details

Format: PlayStation 4
Origin: US
Publisher: Sony
Developer: Sucker Punch
Release: February 2014
Genre: Action
Players: 1

Developer Profile

Shortly following an unremarkable debut with *Rocket: Robot On Wheels* on Nintendo 64, Sucker Punch signed a deal with Sony and went on to create the *Sly Cooper* franchise for the publisher. As it moved onto the PlayStation 3 it turned its attention to a new IP, *InFamous*, the third entry of which the studio is currently developing for PlayStation 4.

Developer History

InFamous 2
2011 [PS3]
InFamous
2009 [PS3]
Sly Cooper And The Thievius Raccoonus
2002 [PS2]
Rocket: Robot On Wheels
1999 [N64]

High Point

A studio that seems to get better with every release, *InFamous 2* upped the ante in terms of scale and ambition. A defining superhero game.

The majority of gameplay Sucker Punch has shown to date has revolved around Delsin's smoke/fire abilities, but he's also able to absorb the powers of other conduits (the name given to the game's superhumans) he comes into contact with, further differentiating him from the rather blunt capabilities of Cole's mutation. It's been revealed that Delsin will be able to manipulate neon, but exactly how that is implemented in gameplay terms isn't yet clear (other than as another explosive projective, we imagine it could be used to snuff-out lights in stealth-based missions).

When all things are considered, it's really the little details that draw *InFamous: Second Son* out from the other launch window titles scheduled for the PlayStation 4. It's hard not to admire the impressive amount of lighting, particle and environmental details – more so than we've seen in any of the platform's bespoke titles to date – and the manner it approaches DualShock 4 looks involving enough if a tad gimmicky (getting phone calls, using fingerprint security and so on – nothing beyond the Wii Remote, really).

Yet when you consider *Second Son* against the likes of *Killzone: Shadow Fall*, *DriveClub*, or even *Knack*, there's a nascent capacity to offer something far greater than an enhanced genre retread. In *InFamous: Second Son* we might just have a PS4 exclusive that isn't completely predictable.





Left: It's not a *Final Fantasy* game until you've encountered a Behemoth, and the redesigned beast looks utterly stunning in the Luminous Engine. Below: Square Enix have stated that the game world will be based on real world locations – making this a 'fantasy based on reality'. The city of Accordo is a prime example of this: it bears a striking resemblance to St Mark's Basilica in Venice.



INFORMATION

Details

Format:
PlayStation 4, Xbox One
Origin:
Japan
Publisher:
Square Enix
Developer:
In-house
Release:
2014
Genre:
RPG
Players:
1

Developer Profile

Square Enix was formed from the merger of Squaresoft and Enix – both juggernauts in the JRPG realm. Responsible for flagship role-playing game franchises *Dragon Quest* and *Final Fantasy*, Square Enix has taken a much more Western approach to games development over the last generation, the result visible in games such as *Tomb Raider* and *Deus Ex*.

Recent History

Final Fantasy XIV: A Realm Reborn
2013 [PS3, PC]
The Last Remnant
2009 [Xbox 360, PS3, PC]
Kingdom Hearts 2
2005 [PS2]
Final Fantasy Crystal Chronicles
2003 [Gamecube]

High Point

Despite being a departure from a series well-known for its rigid structures, *Final Fantasy XIII* delivered a Japanese RPG unlike any had seen before, replete with strong nods to its Western influences.

Final Fantasy XV

CONCEPT The brooding prince of a powerful kingdom seeks revenge against the tyrannical dynasty that murdered his family.

Tetsuya Nomura on his next-gen effort

The chequered history of *Final Fantasy XV* is more convoluted than a standard JRPG plot – originally conceived as *Final Fantasy Versus XIII*, a game sharing the same world and mythology as *XIII* itself – *XV* was re-revealed at this year's E3, promising to be a *Final Fantasy* game that continues the series' penchant for introducing innovative gameplay, while also retaining the specific formulae that make *Final Fantasy* games unique.

Having undergone over seven years of development, it's clear Square Enix isn't just trying to push *Final Fantasy XV* out of the door to hit an early next-gen launch. Series producer and *Final Fantasy* veteran Tetsuya Nomura tells us that the game was re-aligned for a next-gen release after about two years of development. "Changing the game [to run on] next-gen hardware has had both advantages and disadvantages for development. Being next-gen, we wanted to improve the overall quality [of the game], but to do that requires a much finer and more detailed level of finish which in turn ramps up the volume of development work that needs to be done."

From the gameplay we've seen so far, it's clear that Square Enix is really pushing the Luminous Engine to deliver the most polished, graphically stunning results it can. The use of an in-house engine that's been built from scratch has proved problematic for Square Enix before, though – prompting extensive periods of development for their titles while development teams become accustomed to the tools they're using. "With our tech demo, *Agni's Philosophy*, our internal CG department established the Look Dev method – a tool to express the direction of a game's visual style through video," explains Nomura. "I feel that [design process] has contributed greatly to the development of *Final Fantasy XV*."

Summons – a *Final Fantasy* staple – are back, and categorised into a rank system that scales dependent on size. We assume Leviathan is one of the higher ranks.

Assuming the role of Noctis Lucis Caelum – heir apparent to the throne of Lucis – *Final Fantasy XV* will set you on a quest to avenge your father in a *Hamlet*-inspired tale of regicide, treachery and brotherhood. Standard JRPG fare, then? Not according to Nomura: "I must point out that personally I do not really understand the idea of categorising games into a genre like 'Japanese RPGs'," he tells us. "It is only recently that some games have come to be called 'JRPGs' or whatever, and I feel that nothing has really changed from before, with this moniker suddenly coming out of nowhere. I think that RPGs are simply RPGs wherever they are from."

This attitude towards producing an RPG could be exactly what the *Final Fantasy* franchise needs to give the series a fresh rush of blood and help Square Enix supersede the commercial heights *Final Fantasy XIII* reached back in 2010.





"The peaceful lives Crown Prince Noctis and his entourage once knew are consumed by the flames of war"
PRESS RELEASE SQUARE ENIX

INFORMATION

Details

Format: Multi
Origin: Canada
Publisher: Ubisoft
Developer: Ubisoft Montreal
Release: 2014
Players: 1-2

Developer Profile

Ubisoft's Canadian headquarters has become a juggernaut, delivering annual *Assassin's Creed* entries, alongside other triple-A behemoths *Far Cry*, *Watch Dogs* and titles from the *Tom Clancy* franchise. It's now the largest developer in the world, employing over 2,300 members of staff. It has come a long way since it opened its doors in 1997.

High Point

Prince Of Persia: Sands Of Time not only reinvigorated the moribund franchise but gave the whole platforming genres a much-needed shot of adrenaline.

Developer History

Far Cry 3
2012 [Multi]
Assassin's Creed
2007 [Multi]
Prince Of Persia: The Sands Of Time
2003 [Multi]
Tom Clancy's Splinter Cell
2002 [Multi]

Child Of Light

CONCEPT Utilising the UbiArt Framework, *Child Of Light* marries oldschool RPG with a beguiling art style, courtesy of the UbiArt Framework.

Brightening up Ubisoft's 2014 slate

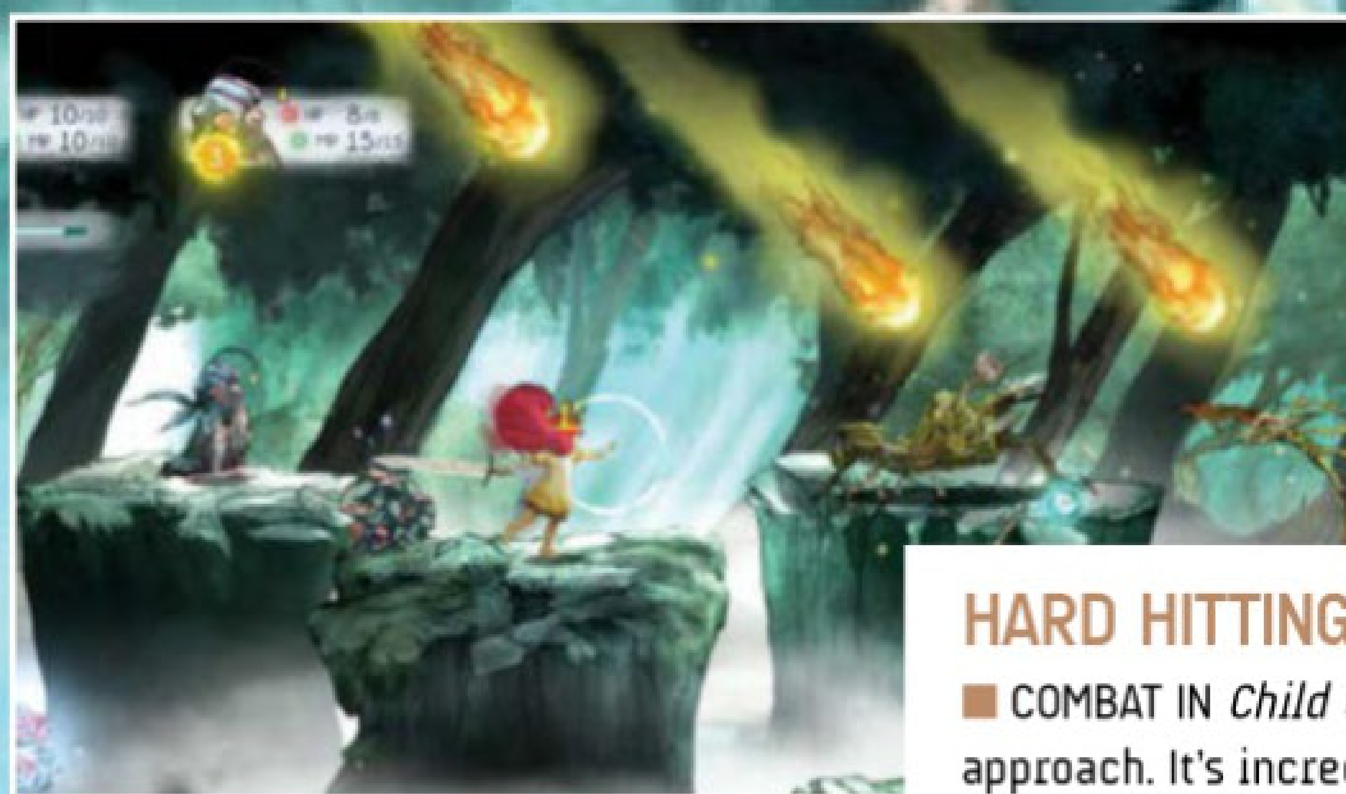
It's curious that Ubisoft's in-house UbiArt Framework, the engine that facilitates *Rayman Origins* and *Legends*' stunningly vibrant aesthetical palette, is only now being utilised across other Ubisoft titles. *Child Of Light* is one of two upcoming downloadable games from the studio that adopts the engine (the other being World War I true-life fable *Valiant Hearts: The Great War*), extracting influence from Eastern European fairy tales to submerge its eclectic cast of characters into a dark fantasy drawn in crude brush strokes and painted in watercolours.

More pertinent, however, is where the gameplay draws its inspiration. The development team (intriguingly, the same that worked on *Far Cry 3*) has cited *Final Fantasy VI* and *Chrono Trigger* as having a huge influence on *Child Of Light*'s design, evident in its turn-based combat, quest companions and even the narrative – the story told through the eyes of a young girl (Aurora), the innocence of her youth contrasting against the harsh evils she witnesses on her journey.

There's an air of melancholy as we guide Aurora through ramshackle villages and luminescent caverns, evoking a conflicting state of unsettlement and serenity that recalls *Journey*'s mystical appeal. This is enriched by the permeating sense of intrigue across the world. We're tasked with solving the mystery in a village we pass, the townsfolk of which have been struck by a curse transforming them all into crows.

In terms of world building and visual impact, there's no question that *Child Of Light* shines, but it remains to be seen whether the gameplay can maintain a similar allure over its full narrative. After all, namedropping two seminal role-playing games comes with a certain level of expectation.





HARD HITTING

COMBAT IN *Child Of Light* takes a JRPG, turn-based approach. It's incredibly straightforward but ingrained with a certain amount of depth. The skill comes in timing, picking the right attack and paying attention to the timeline at the bottom of the screen. Additionally, treasures and ores found around the environment – known as Pieces of Oculi – can be equipped during skirmishes to award attack, defence and speed buffs.

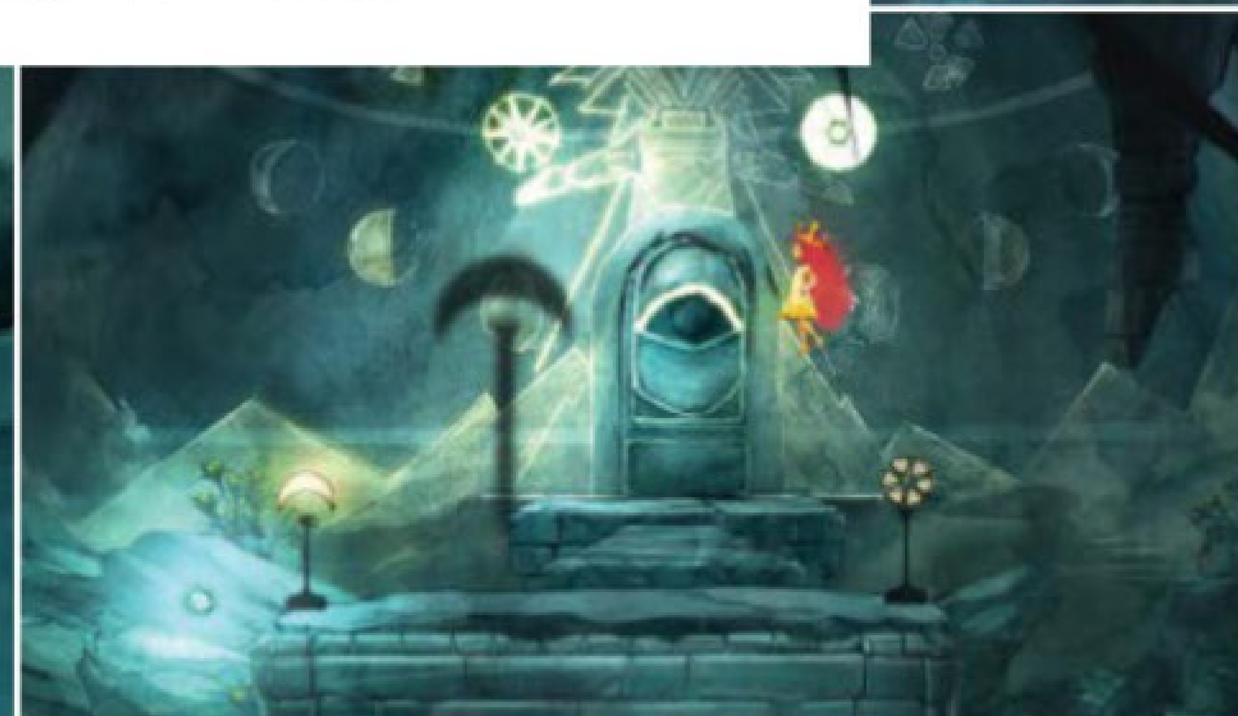


SHINING A LIGHT

■ PUZZLES PLAY a huge role in *Child Of Light*. One encountered in our demo involved a door that could only be unlocked by using Igniculus to illuminate symbols corresponding to imprints circling the door's frame. We're hoping that the rest of the puzzles match the imaginative blend of visual flair and game mechanics evidenced here.

GLOWING ON ME

■ AURORA DOESN'T embark on her adventure alone. She's accompanied by Igniculus, a blue orb-like fella who can be controlled by a second player. Aside from collecting orbs from around the environment, his true talents lie in combat where he can blind enemies, replenish ally health and collect replenishing items in the field.



"Building an alternate London was the foundation we had to start with when making this game. We took a trip there and took over 38,000 pictures of the place!"
RU WEERASURIYA, WRITER THE ORDER: 1886, READY AT DAWN

The Order: 1886

■ You'll play through the game as Galahad – a member of the eponymous Order. Gameplay details are practically non-existent at the minute, but we're tentatively referring to the title as *Left 4 Dead: 1886*.

CONCEPT ■ A mysterious unnatural force is operating under the shadows in London's shadier districts, and an enigmatic Knights Templar-esque group are the only ones that can stop it.

Panic on the streets of London

Games set quite solidly in the real world are a gamble – part of what makes gaming unique is the ability it has to wrest players out of the real world and give them a tangible sense of agency in a new realm. By using familiar environments – like *The Order: 1886* does with London – developers risk either alienating players that have never been to that location or inhibiting immersion by highlighting just what's *different* about the location's digital representation.

The Order: 1886 addresses this issue by giving the faithful recreation of London a completely alternate history – using recognisable districts such as Whitechapel as a framing device to tell an entirely new story, complete with supernatural ghouls and dieselpunk weaponry. Built from the ground up on the RAD Engine 4.0, the game has been designed specifically to take advantage of the PS4's hardware. Rather than textures being painted onto polygonal frames, each asset is built from six base textures that can be combined to emulate real surfaces. In a tech demo we were shown, Ready At Dawn showed off metallic, wooden and cloth-based materials that react dynamically with the engine's lighting processes and player interactions. For the end user, this means an incredibly impressive looking game. For the game's designers, however, it offers a far more practical functionality: creating content can take minutes, rather than days.

We're shown a level running in real-time – the developer takes us through an underground hideout, replete with marble walls and wooden architecture before heading up a stairway to a rain-dappled cobbled street. Thanks to the RAD 4.0's ABEL system, the game's designers have more freedom when plotting level topography and friction. This leads to some stunningly realistic destruction in-game; the developers took us to a testing area where they used a variety of guns to shoot up bits of wood that splintered and buckled exactly as we'd expect in real life. The array of weapons and destructible surfaces on offer is vast – the deformability of flesh is almost disturbingly lifelike, but all the more gratuitous for it (especially when you get hold of the pipebombs or shotguns).

What we were shown got us excited for what the game in full has to offer. If Ready at Dawn can make the most of the engine it's showing off, then expect to see a very realistic game that takes the Victorian post-industrial setting and paints it with a mythological membrane that – we hope – straddles the delicate line between intuitive realism and escapist fiction.

INFORMATION

Details

Format: PlayStation 4
Origin: America
Publisher: Sony Computer Entertainment
Developer: Ready At Dawn
Release: 2014
Genre: Action/adventure
Players: TBA

Producer Profile

Ready at Dawn Studios was formed in 2003 by staff that had worked at Naughty Dog and Blizzard Entertainment. The company's most notable work has been on the PSP versions of existing franchises.

Producer History

God Of War: Origins Collection
2011 [PS3]

Okami [Port]
2008 [Wii]

Daxter
2006 [PSP]

High Point

Slightly shorter than the main *God Of War* games, *God Of War: Ghost Of Sparta* pushed the PSP hardware to the limits, providing a meaty expansion.



■ Above: Those familiar with London will recognise some of the accurately recreated environments – this is Berkeley Square in Mayfair, for example.





Trials Frontier

CONCEPT ■ The party favourite franchise makes the jump to mobile and tablet devices, promising to keep the same level of quality apparent in its console predecessors

Motocross-platform gaming

INFORMATION

Details

Format: iOS
Origin: Finland
Publisher: Ubisoft
Developer: RedLynx
Release: 2013
Genre: Racing Platform
Players: 1

Developer Profile

RedLynx, founded in 2000, is a subsidiary of Ubisoft and has made games for a wide variety of gaming platforms – starting with the ill-fated Nokia N-Gage. RedLynx has a strong pedigree with handheld racing games and RTS titles, having worked on licensed titles for the PSP and Nintendo DS, too.

Developer History

Trials HD
2009 [Xbox 360]
Warhammer 40,000: Squad Command
2007 [Multi]
Pathway to Glory
2004 [Nokia N-Gage]

High Point

RedLynx's first XBLA offering, *Trials HD*, proved to be a smash hit both critically and commercially, offering addictive just-one-more-go gameplay that had players jostling for the top position on the leaderboards years after the game's release.

When *Trials HD* dropped onto Xbox Live Arcade in 2009, it hypnotised us here at games™ – we were obsessed with the compulsive gameplay and anarchic tone the game offered, sinking countless hours into trying to surpass our friends' ridiculous times. When a mobile version of the platform-racer was announced, we were both excited and scared: excited that we'd have a *Trials* game to play on the go, scared that we'd become social outcasts, sat in the corner tapping away at our phones.

Alas, the game seems to have suffered somewhat in its journey to the mobile realm – the translation has dented the rebellious nature of the franchise, cartoonifying the art direction and stylising everything to – we assume – become more mobile-friendly. Of course this is the case, though; if you're developing a title to go free-to-play and launching it on one of the most accessible operating systems in the world, you're going to want to appeal to the broadest audience possible. This philosophy is echoed in the new story mode the game offers – a fairly arbitrary affair that sees NPCs give the player quests to achieve money and cogs (which can be traded for cosmetic items or world-building tools respectively). The story mode seems a little crowbarred into a title like *Trials* – a series which has relied on the strength of its gameplay up until now. Still, it's a pleasant addition and will certainly add longevity to the title – something a lot of mobile games often lack. We're assured that items found in the campaign will allow players to upgrade their bikes and riders to make later missions that little bit easier.

■ We're terrified that RedLynx's mobile offering is going to consume every spare hour we have, eat up our phone batteries and ruin our friendships... again.



"There are two kinds of people in the world, those that love Trials and those that don't know Trials exist"
JUSTIN SWAN, LEAD DESIGNER REDLYNX

The narrative will revolve around the player exploring a world that's fallen back into feudal patterns, with small villages scattered amongst the ruins of the past civilisations. Players will be given the option to grow their own village and explore a world map, populated with different level-types and zones. The free-to-play mechanic will work similarly to most other mobile F2P games – with a certain amount of 'fuel' available at a time that will replenish over time (think 'lives' in *Candy Crush Saga*). RedLynx asserts that the game will not be play-to-win – with players able to complete the game for free if they desire, stating also that no premium content will give gameplay perks unavailable to free players.

Trials Frontier has been developed alongside the next-gen game *Trials Fusion*, and owning both titles will grant bonuses in each game. With no release date more specific than 2013, we expect the game to come out around the launch of the next-gen – a subtle reminder that *Trials Fusion* is on its way. Being the *Trials* franchise's first foray onto mobile devices, we really hope *Frontier* is consistent with the quality we've seen from previous instalments.

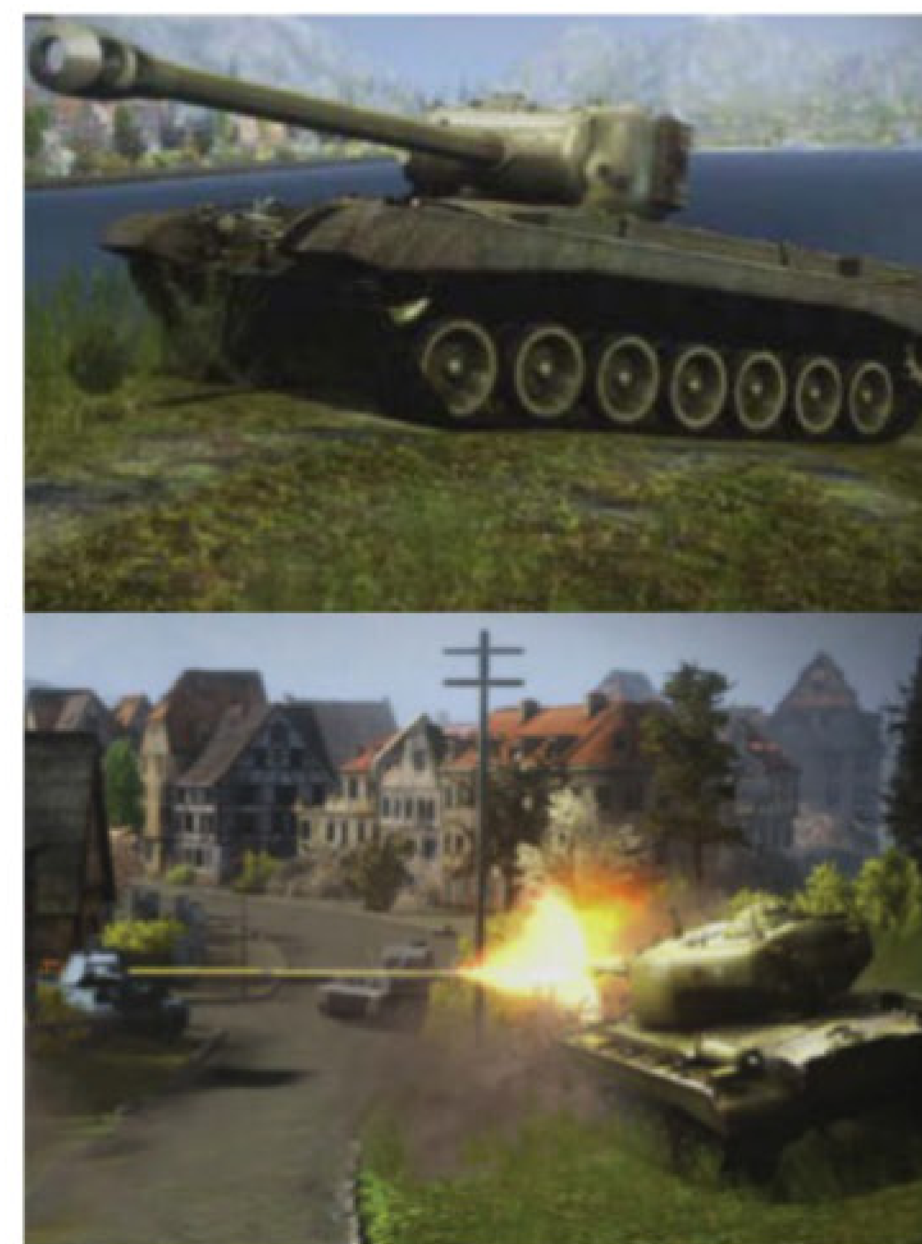


■ Below: There are going to be a lot of difficult obstacles in your way in Trials Frontier, and it's going to take all of your thumb-based skills to navigate around them.





"From our early technical beta testing we've seen tremendous numbers of players get into the game"
DENNY THORLEY, GENERAL MANAGER WARGAMING WEST



■ There are a variety of battlegrounds in *World Of Tanks*, each with their own faithful WWII aesthetic.

World Of Tanks: Xbox 360 Edition

CONCEPT ■ 15v15 player tank-on-tank gameplay, designed to satisfy every gamer's craving for explosive, tread-shooting World War II tactical action

Is the Xbox 360's biggest free-to-play game on the right tracks?

The success of *World Of Tanks* on the PC has lead developer Wargaming.net to build a dedicated game from the ground up for the Xbox 360, which will be released free-to-play for Xbox Live Gold subscribers. It seems quite odd – a game that relies so heavily on the slow tactics of mouse and keyboard play seeing a transfer to a traditional gamepad. But it seems to work – Wargaming.net has had one singular focus when shifting the title over to console, and that focus is accessibility.

The first notable difference we found with the Xbox 360 version with our hands-on at Gamescom was the speed at which you're put into a match. The whole process seems far slicker than it does on the game's PC sibling, and we assume that when the service proper rolls out over Xbox Live that matchmaking will be even easier – being one of the only free-to-play games gracing Microsoft's console, we expect we'll see a healthy amount of gamers populating the servers.



■ With so many tanks available to play as, you'll have to weigh up whether you prefer playing as your favourite design, or choosing machines for tactics.

INFORMATION

Details

Format: Xbox 360
Origin: Belarus
Publisher: Wargaming.net
Developer: Wargaming West
Release: Winter 2013
Genre: MMO
Players: Up to 30 (online)

Developer Profile

Wargaming.net specialises in turn-based strategy and real-time strategy games, operating under the motto 'strategic satisfaction'. With over 800 staff, the developer came to prominence with the critically acclaimed *Massive Assault* series, before galvanizing its place in the industry with the release of *Order Of War*.

Developer History

World Of Tanks **2011 [PC]**
Order of War **2009 [PC]**
Massive Assault **2003 [PC]**

High Point

Hitting the PC with *World Of Tanks* in 2011, Wargaming.net was one of the first companies to prove that the free-to-play model can not only work, but can prove to be incredibly successful – netting the company over €6.1 million net profit for the 2012 financial year.

Movement has also been altered to suit to the console pad – navigating around the war-torn European locales is much more fluid than on the PC version, and seems a lot quicker, too. Using the analogue stick to manoeuvre isn't as jarring as we expected, with new players instantly able to pick up the mechanics of the game and start trundling around the maps.

The game isn't as frenetic as other shooters you'll find on the Xbox, but that's the point of *World Of Tanks* – this isn't just an arena in which you run around shooting other players to pieces; there's more of a focus on strategy and forward-thinking here. Because the majority of tanks aren't very manoeuvrable, players will have to consider how they're going to approach enemies – flanking and taking advantage of cover are key strategic approaches here. If you simply roll onto the best vantage point with hopes of raining death on the opposing team, you'll find yourself quickly out-manned and vulnerable.

The Xbox 360 version isn't as attractive as its PC predecessor – some of the textures look very dated, and the flora scattered around the maps looks positively last-gen – but what it lacks in aesthetic charm it makes up for in accessibility. The tanks themselves seem faithful enough to their real-life counterparts, and machine-heads will be pleased to note the full game will launch with over 100 customisable war machines to control. The game has been in beta for a few months now, and at the time of writing the title still has no solid release. We're confident that Wargaming.net can deliver the first truly engaging free-to-play game on the Xbox 360, though, so as far as we're concerned, the wait should be worth it.



Below: The original *Max* title was released on almost every format except for Xbox 360. Now the publisher has bought the studio and assured that *Max: The Curse Of Brotherhood* is an Xbox exclusive.





INFORMATION

Details

Format: Xbox One, Xbox 360
Origin: Denmark
Publisher: Microsoft Studios
Developer: Press Play
Release: 2014
Genre: Platformer
Players: 1

Developer Profile

Based in Copenhagen, Press Play enjoyed quiet success with *Max & The Magic Marker* and *Tentacles: Enter The Dolphin* and its subsequent DLC, before Microsoft acquired the studio in 2012 and put it to work exclusively on Xbox 360 and Xbox One. Press Play's first title under the stewardship of Microsoft is *Max: The Curse Of Brotherhood*, a reimagining of its first title.

Developer History

Dog Eat Dog (DLC)
2012 [Mob]

Tentacles: Enter The Dolphin
2012 [Mob]

Max & The Magic Marker
2010 [Multi]

High Point

Its first product, *Max & The Magic Marker* demonstrated the studio's capacity for captivating conceits within traditional genres.

Max: The Curse Of Brotherhood

CONCEPT Use a series of magical pens to solve puzzles and traverse a fantastical landscape, as a young boy searches for his kidnapped brother.

The pen is mightier than the sword

It's not often a developer is afforded a second chance at an idea. We're not talking about a sequel here, but a full back-to-formula assessment of an original conceit; extrapolating exactly what did and didn't work to reimagine a product slicker than its progenitor. Back to the drawing board, you might say.

Acquired by Microsoft in 2012, Danish outfit Press Play has been given exactly that chance, returning to the world of 2010's *Max & The Magic Marker* and setting out to create a more complex and involving platformer experience than first time around.

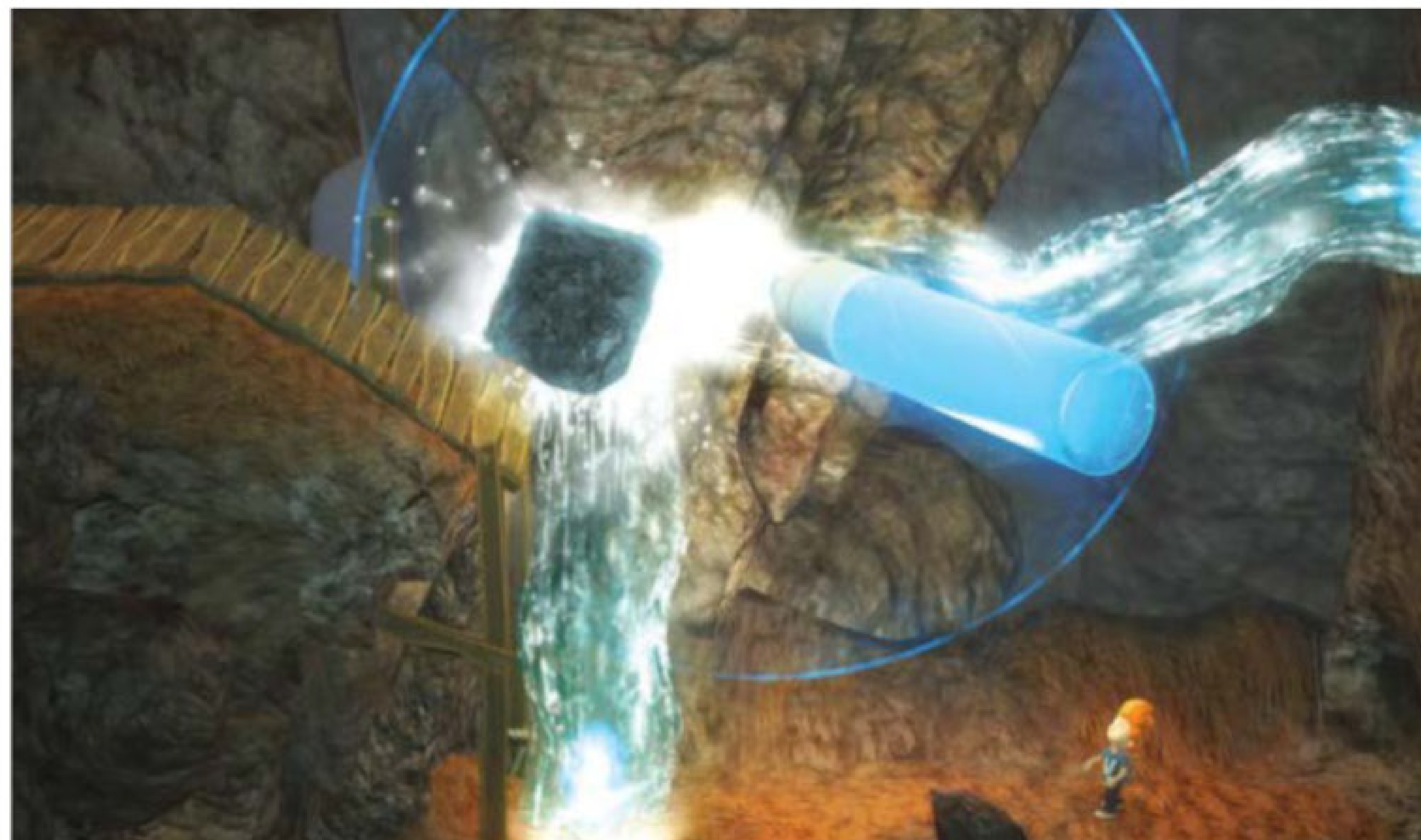
The original *Max* title enabled players to explore the world around him by drawing objects that could assist Max when navigating through the world. The design was relatively open for a puzzle game, which often made it too easy to fall back on the same tricks to progress through each chapter.

The Curse Of Brotherhood by comparison appears far more straightforward, taking a more focused approach by narrowing the magical abilities of Max's stationary to context sensitive scenarios. Here, his pen can manipulate earth, water and fire – for example, pulling a vine out of a tree to create a platform, or stretching a stream to create a bridge to an unexplored area. What this idea enables is for the developer to create a taxing gauntlet of cerebral brainteasers that players have to solve in a very specific way. Imagine the ingenuity of a stripped-back *Portal* with the visual kick of a Nickelodeon cartoon.

When we're given some hands-on time, we find ourselves in a later stage of the game in which Max's pen has gained the power of water. It's primarily used as a powerful jet to push Max towards unreachable areas, but the real skill comes in the interplay between each element and figuring out how, for instance, a vine can interact with flowing water, pushing it into reach of Max who can use it to scale towards an unreachable platform.

> "The old marker was more marker than magic. This time it is the other way around"
> MIKKEL MARTIN PEDERSEN PRESS PLAY

Press Play has done an admirable job of underpinning the experience with solid physics to make platforming impressively breezy, even with *Brotherhood*'s considered pacing. It's also more visually striking than the game that precedes it, utilising a 2.5D style that imbues it with a cinematic gloss that pushes the storytelling a little further. We're also told that the world itself will continue to grow darker and more complex as Max delves deeper in search of his lost brother. Not that it will mean much to players unless the puzzles fuelling exploration are sufficiently inventive, but from our brief time with the game we found no lack of creative spark in this rejuvenated Max.



Above: There are four pen powers: raising platforms from earth, creating vines, manipulating water and casting fire.

SHOWCASE

MORE TITLES TO WATCH FOR ON THE GAMING HORIZON

DISGAEA DIMENSIONS 2: A BRIGHTER DARKNESS

Format: **PS3**
Publisher: **NIS America**
Developer: **Nippon Ichi Software**
ETA: **September 2014**



A DIRECT sequel to *Disgaea: Hour Of Darkness*, *D2* is a tactical role-playing game that focuses on you commanding stock characters and combatants you create yourself, *D2* reintroduces Laharl as the primary protagonist along with his mouthy deputy Etna. The game looks as madcap as any other *Disgaea*, especially with the ability to slam-dunk enemies to death.

FIGHTBACK

Format: **iOS, Android**
Publisher: **Chillingo**
Developer: **Ninja Theory**
ETA: **2014**



FROM THE developers that bought us the recent reboot of *DmC: Devil May Cry*, *Fightback* promises to be a thrilling free-to-play action game with a revolutionary touch-based combat system. The game, with an aesthetic not dissimilar to the grindhouse action films of the Eighties, stars a Duke Nukem-alike as the main fighter, and could very well be the definitive mobile brawler **games™** has been looking for.

MONSTER HUNTER 4

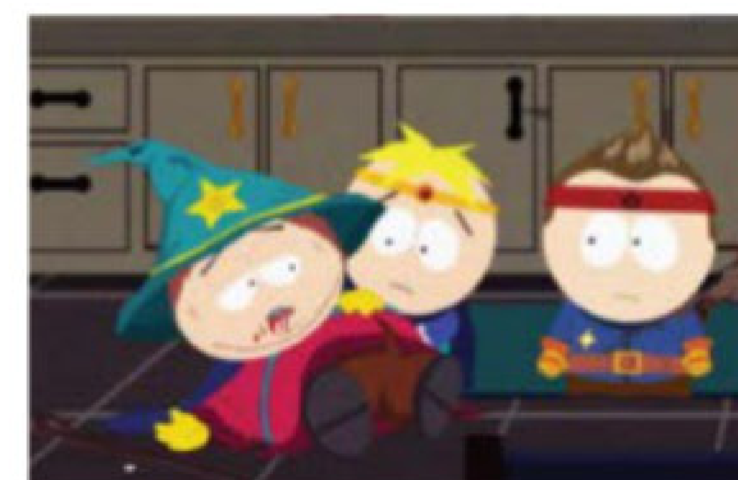
Format: **3DS**
Publisher: **Capcom**
Developer: **In-house**
ETA: **2014**



TO BE released in Japan on 14 September, *Monster Hunter 4* will address the myriad issues its predecessor suffered with clunky controls and movement. Encouragingly, *Monster Hunter 4* looks like a very fluid game, and will include larger environments, smarter monster AI, online multiplayer and more of a focus on adventure and narrative than previous titles.

SOUTH PARK: THE STICK OF TRUTH

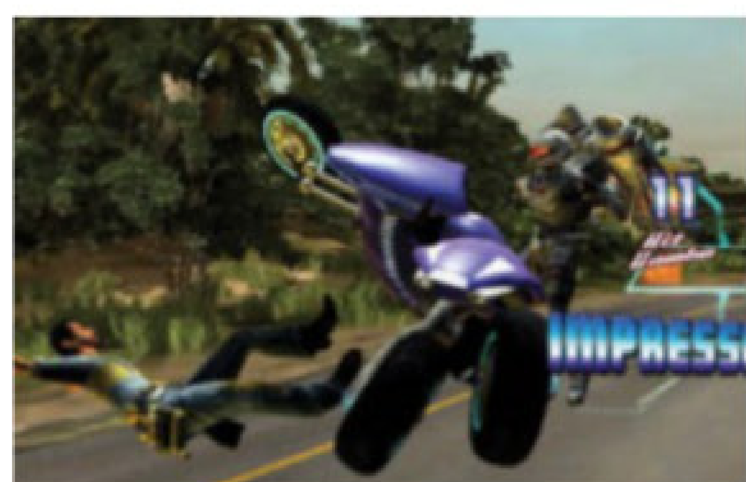
Format: **PC, Xbox 360, PS3**
Publisher: **Ubisoft**
Developer: **Obsidian Entertainment**
ETA: **2014**



BACK IN January, when Ubisoft bought the publishing rights to *Stick Of Truth*, we all thought this would be in our hands by the summer. Fast forward to September, and we're still without a release date. The upside of this delay, however, is that the game must be getting a *lot* of Ubi polish, and considering it's being written by *South Park* scribes Trey Parker and Matt Stone, we think it'll be worth the wait.

LOCOCYCLE

Format: **XBLA**
Publisher: **Microsfot Game Studios**
Developer: **Twisted Pixel**
ETA: **2013**



ANNOUNCED WAY back at E3 last year, *Lococycle* gives you control over a sentient motorcycle (named IRIS) who is locked in a constant battle with rival AI-powered bike, SPIKE. Rumours abound that it will be an Xbox One launch title, but having been in development for the last year, we have no idea when it will come out, but considering Twisted Pixel's stellar portfolio, we hope it's soon.

MEW-GENICS

Format: **PC, Mobile**
Publisher: **TBC**
Developer: **Team Meat**
ETA: **2013**



TOUTED BY the creators as a 'cat-lady sim', *Mew-Genics* looks like it has all the character you'd expect from a Team Meat release. Slotting into the gaming spectrum somewhere between *Pokémon* and *Animal Crossing*, *Mew-Genics* has a variety of previously unseen mechanics, like having to separate aggressive cats, preventing strays from spreading feline AIDs (yes, really) and dealing with narcolepsy.

FABLES: THE WOLF AMONG US

Format: **Multi**
Publisher: **Telltale Games**
Developer: **In-house**
ETA: **2013**



HAVING PROVED their point-and-click chops with the *Walking Dead* games last year, we have high expectations for Telltale's next game. Taking the role of Bigby Wolf, this will feature a choice-based system that asks whether the player wants to try and remain friendly with NPCs, or 'give in' to their wolf side. Originally slated for an autumn release, we hope to see more of the game in action soon.

AGE OF WONDERS III

Format: **PC, Mac**
Publisher: **Triumph Studios**
Developer: **In-house**
ETA: **Q1 2014**

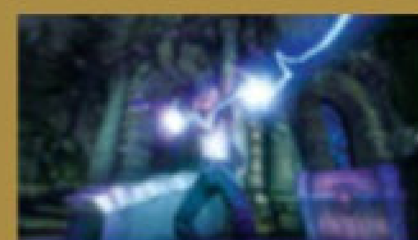


BEING BUILT by the majority of the team that created the first *Age Of Wonders*, the third instalment has had a difficult time securing funding. That changed fairly recently, however, when Triumph managed to secure backing from *Minecraft* creator Markus 'Notch' Persson. The injection of resources and funds pushed the release date back to spring 2014, so we've got to wait a little longer to get our hands on this.



DELAYED – Kingdom Hearts III (Multi)

With both *Final Fantasy XV* and *Kingdom Hearts III* sharing the same director in Tetsuya Nomura, Square Enix has made it clear that a simultaneous release is unlikely. Estimated *Kingdom Hearts III* release date: 2056.



DELAYED – Fable Anniversary (360)

One of the Xbox 360's only notable 2013 exclusives in a rather pitiful year will not make it here in time for Christmas, sadly, with Lionhead pushing back this HD re-release until February of 2014.

CONTRAST

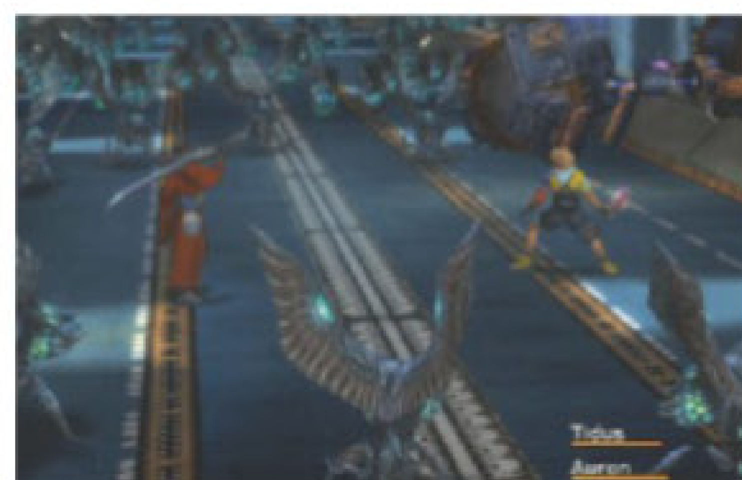
Format: **Multi**
Publisher: **Focus Home Interactive**
Developer: **Compulsion Games**
ETA: **2013**



HAVING BEEN in production for a good four years, Compulsion Games are finally starting to show the world they've been working on. Playing as Dawn, you can use abilities to move between 2D shadow worlds and 3D real worlds. Set in a world of cabaret, live jazz, fairgrounds, acrobatics and illusions, *Contrast* is reminiscent of PSone platformer *Silhouette Mirage* – and to us, that can only be a good thing.

FINAL FANTASY X/X-2 HD REMASTER

Format: **PS3, PSVita**
Publisher: **Square Enix**
Developer: **In-house**
ETA: **March 2014**



THE GROUNDBREAKING JRPG is perhaps the most deserving game of a HD remaster we can think of, so we're pleased that Square has finally announced the release window. Everything we've seen so far proves that this is more than your standard HD port; with a polished battle interface, fully remixed soundtrack and reworked character models, the game looks like it was made for the PS3 all along.

EVERYBODY'S GONE TO THE RAPTURE

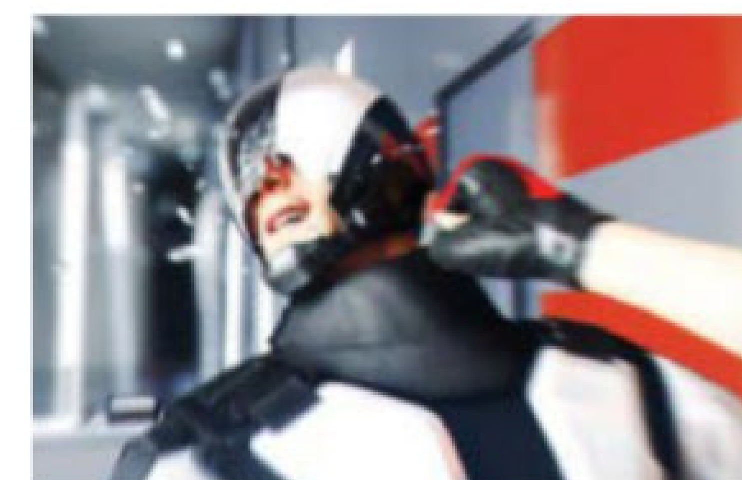
Format: **PS4**
Publisher: **Sony Computer Entertainment**
Developer: **The Chinese Room**
ETA: **2014**



THE SPIRITUAL successor to the arty narrative-driven *Dear Esther, Everybody's Gone To The Rapture* was announced as a PS4 exclusive at this year's Gamescom. This left some PC gamers feeling a little disillusioned, since it was the PC-only *Dear Esther* that brought the developers to the attention of many players. However, we're just happy that we get to play it at all.

MIRROR'S EDGE 2

Format: **PS4, Xbox One**
Publisher: **EA**
Developer: **DICE**
ETA: **2014**



ALTHOUGH WE don't know if it'll actually be called *Mirror's Edge 2*, the sequel to the parkour-platformer is still hot on our radar after its debut at this year's E3. Supposedly a sequel charting Faith's back story, it has no release window, and DICE have admitted they didn't know the direction the game was going in until recently. We hope this tentative approach leads to greater results down the line.

SHIN MEGAMI TENSEI X FIRE EMBLEM

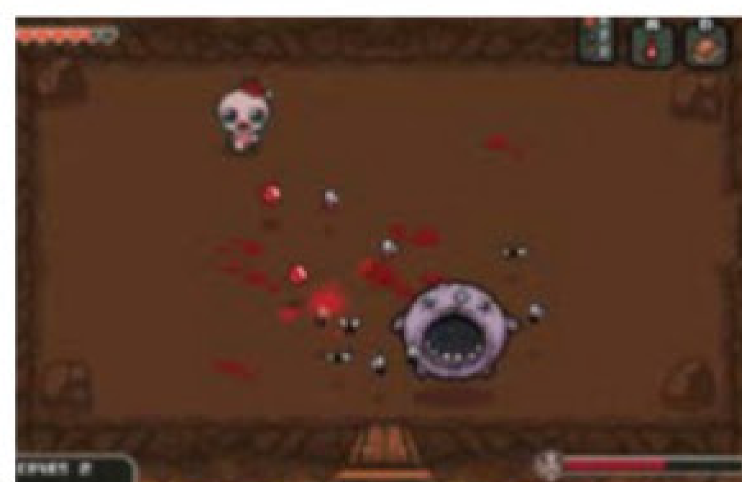
Format: **Wii U**
Publisher: **Nintendo**
Developer: **Atlus, Intelligent Systems**
ETA: **2014**



DESPITE THERE being little known about the RPG mash-up, the title is alive and well, and the *Fire Emblem* elements will creep into the real-world setting of modern Tokyo. We're keen to see this do well – it's exactly the kind of RPG we've been after on the Wii U, and has a lot of potential. Nintendo's Hitoshi Yamagami teased a Pegasus landing in Tokyo's Shibuya – who doesn't want to see that?

THE BINDING OF ISAAC: REBIRTH

Format: **PS3, PS4, PSVita, PC**
Publisher: **Nicalis Inc**
Developer: **Nicalis Inc**
ETA: **2014**



AFTER THE success of *The Binding Of Isaac*, Edmund McMillen decided it would benefit from a de-make. In an age of HD-upscaling, McMillen opted to remake the game in a whole new engine, forgoing Adobe Flash for something more 16-bit. This will feature all the original's content with the expansion pack *Wrath Of The Lamb*, alongside new rooms, enemies, bosses and a new final chapter.

THE WITCH AND THE HUNDRED KNIGHTS

Format: **PS3**
Publisher: **NIS America**
Developer: **Nippon Ichi Software**
ETA: **2014**



THIS FRENETIC action-role playing game sees you take control of Metallica – a swamp witch who is engaged in a perpetual battle for supremacy with a rival from the forest realms. Interestingly, her name has been changed to 'Metallia' in the Western release, presumably to avoid lawsuits from a certain metal band. It looks over-the-top, bloody and dark, so naturally we're excited.

AQUAPAZZA: AQUAPLUS DREAM MATCH

Format: **PS3**
Publisher: **ATLUS**
Developer: **Examu**
ETA: **2014**



WE ARE huge fans of fighting games, and the prospect of one that allows you to tip a bookcase over on someone (yes, really) gets us quite excited. Featuring a roster of characters built from various dating sims, *Aquapazza* currently has no European release date, but with an American version due around Christmas, we can hope for a launch here at some point next year.

WHY I ❤...

Falcon 4.0

MARK RUBIN, INFINITY WARD



I have such a variety of favourites. Falcon 4.0 *for PC is one of my favourite games of all time. The reason I loved* Falcon 4.0 *is first off because I loved flying and planes – I'm a huge plane nut. I think one of the things that* Falcon 4.0 *did really well was that it was one of the first games that I felt truly immersed me in the game, as in I was that pilot. It was so detailed and everything that it just felt like a real experience. That was one of the first games that made me feel like the person I'm playing, and almost convinced me I wasn't playing a game.*





"That was one of the first games that made me feel like the person I'm playing, and almost convinced me I wasn't playing a game"

MARK RUBIN, INFINITY WARD

A Dance with Dragons

Dragon Age: Inquisition marks BioWare's first foray onto Xbox One and PS4 – producer Cameron Lee and cinematic director Jonathan Perry explain how going open world and stepping up its storytelling ambitions with the fantasy RPG makes for the biggest BioWare game yet, not to mention a project that aims to answer the past criticisms from so-called fans…

A SCALY, BEAUTIFULLY-ANIMATED DRAGON CRASHES DOWN ON A MINE IN AN IMMENSE ARENA-SHAPED PATCH OF DESERT, BEFORE SCREECHING AND FLYING OFF. BioWare is firing back against its sometimes-insane critics with the third *Dragon Age* instalment, building a world focused on exploration that permits more extraordinary and ambitious storytelling possibilities than the series has previously brought us. With a structure perhaps inspired by *Skyrim*-like open worlds and a possibly revolutionary expansion of the narrative choice aspects that define modern BioWare RPGs, the Canadian developer's transition onto next gen looks like an almost total rewrite of the *Dragon Age* series.

Dragon Age: Inquisition, quite honestly, feels like a direct reaction to *Dragon Age II*'s many detractors in its





first unveiling. *Dragon Age II* had a single evolving city location cut off from the rest of the world with only human characters to choose from and no option to change your companions' armour; *Inquisition* is composed of multiple open worlds with immense horizons, a range of playable races and fully customisable party members. It's reactive and re-energised, once again changing its identity for the purposes of creative potential.

"So yeah, *Dragon Age II*, there was a lot of feedback from that, which was great," says producer Cameron Lee diplomatically. "We've been fortunate with *Dragon Age: Inquisition*, with the console change in generations and

> "We've been able to build everything from the ground up, so everything's rewritten, everything' recreated. That was the perfect chance to look at feedback and respond to it"

swap to Frostbite that we've been able to build everything from the ground up, so everything's rewritten, everything's recreated. That was the perfect chance to look at that sort of feedback and respond to it. Having feedback like, 'We want playable races' – missing from *Dragon Age II*'. So, okay, we've got the time, we've got the tools, let's put playable races back in, and you know what, let's you play as the Qunari as well, which I think is a pretty cool opportunity."

The Inquisitor, *Inquisition*'s protagonist, hits a middle ground between the vanilla blank slate Grey Warden hero from *Origins* and the very much defined Kirkwall champion Hawke from *Dragon Age II*. "One of the



■ *Dragon Age* finally gets to be a technical showcase on consoles, as opposed to the ugliest of the contemporary RPGs.



■ Wait until you see the dragon moving; the animation and environmental effects really make it. It compares very well to *Skyrim* running with a hi-res texture pack.



principles that we're working towards is that *Dragon Age: Inquisition* is your game – we want you to be able to create the character you want to create, which is why races are there as well, why you can customise the way you look, the way your followers look, crafting is more complex than any BioWare game we've done before. So I think it falls somewhere in between."

Players choose the voice of the Inquisitor, too, unlike with Hawke, in a way that sounds more like the character customisation options of *Saints Row*. "Inquisitor is a voiced character – you're going to be able to pick a voice, so that combined with the playable races, specialisations, the classes, lots of stuff and the story where you decide the fate of the Inquisition and how that reflects the world of the story. I hope the players really get that sense, that it's kind of going back to being their character, it's their game, they can do what they want to do, more so than having a really hard-fixed character like Hawke." The world is pulling itself apart in *Inquisition* for mysterious reasons – the larger kingdoms are too concerned with their own business to really get involved, so the player, as head of this autonomous and powerful force known as the Inquisition, must get to the bottom of it.

Dragon Age II involved Cassandra interrogating Varric, so it's intriguing that *Inquisition*'s newcomer-friendly story seems so intrinsically linked to it.



The ability to play as different races *in Dragon Age: Inquisition* will hopefully offer other storytelling angles on the world.

If that sounds vague as a premise, let it be known that the demo of *Inquisition* shown to us was set entirely outside of the main narrative; that's under wraps for now, early on as it is for the reveal of a game due this time next year. The Inquisition is a force that can shape the course of history in this world, however, from the smallest decision to the largest – that's represented by more than just dialogue wheels this time around, too.

What we're shown is how choice works in *Dragon Age: Inquisition* – action speaks louder than words, as BioWare puts it during the demonstration of a town called Crestwood and its many potential fates. The major choice-based scenario here is over whether you save the village or not. You can choose to either send men to protect the village, stay with the wounded, or defend the Inquisition's keep. In this playthrough, BioWare chooses to defend the keep – this will keep the Inquisition strong as a force but will undoubtedly lose innocent lives. Varric, one of your three party companions and entertaining cohort in *Dragon Age II* (the others are Cassandra, a returning character, and a Mage, Vivienne) expresses his disappointment at leaving the villagers to die. This is a militaristic decision, one chosen from a classic BioWare dialogue wheel.

Yet there's more to your choices this time. On your way to the keep, you see the villagers under attack by a squad



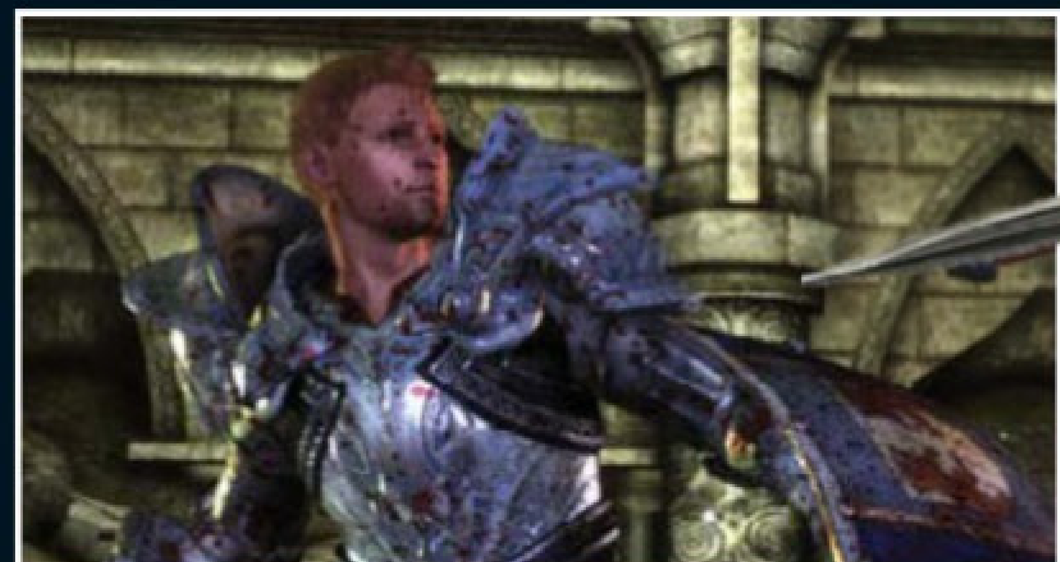
Dragon Age's Ten Most Wanted

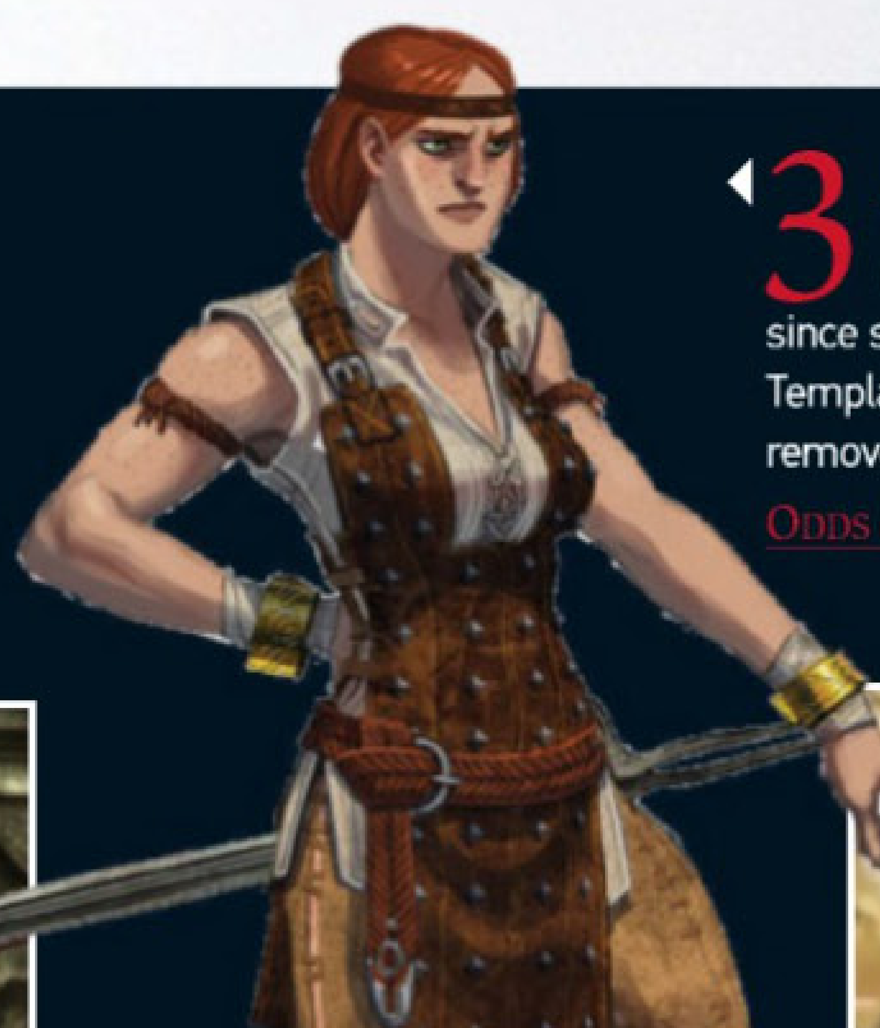
VARRIC, TICK. MORRIGAN, TICK. THESE ARE THE OTHER CHARACTERS WE'D LIKE TO SEE RETURN IN DRAGON AGE: INQUISITION…

1 Alistair

Dragon Age's answer to George from *Blackadder Goes Forth*, Alistair made a fleeting appearance in *Dragon Age II* if he survived *Origins*, and his brand of wry observations in the midst of ludicrous fantasy scenarios would be welcome in *Inquisition*. We left him as king of Ferelden in *Origins*. He'll be back.

Odds on his return **2/1**





3 Aveline

One of the few *Dragon Age* characters who cannot be wooed, since she already had her own in-ranks romance going on with the Templars in Kirkwall, we expect Aveline's direct ties to her city will remove her from *Inquisition*'s narrative.

Odds on her return **149/1**





2 Isabela

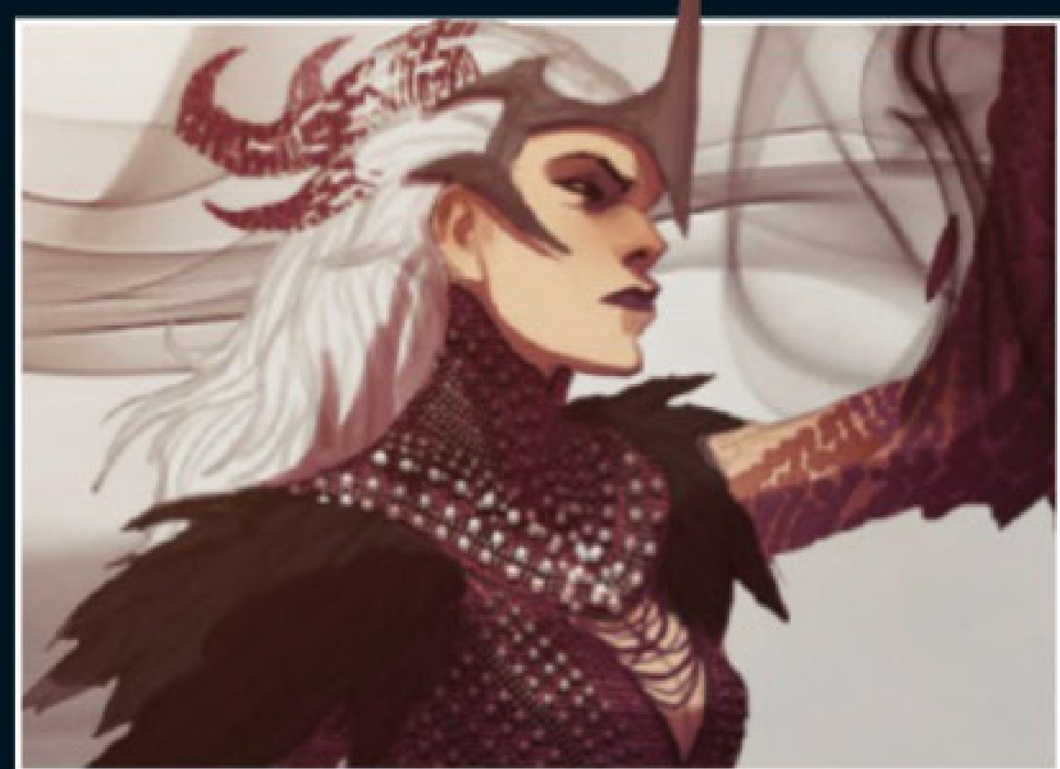
Briefly part of *Origins* and a main character in *Dragon Age II*, Isabela is a flirty pirate who makes it very clear she's into flings rather than relationships. As the series' most Han Solo-like character, we'd be intrigued to see which power she now obeys in this land, if any.

Odds on her return **12/1**

4 Tallis

Star of the *Mark Of The Assassin* DLC pack, which actually addressed a lot of the issues in *Dragon Age II* that people were complaining about (not that internet fans were listening), Tallis vanishes soon after, leaving an obvious ambiguity to bring her back.

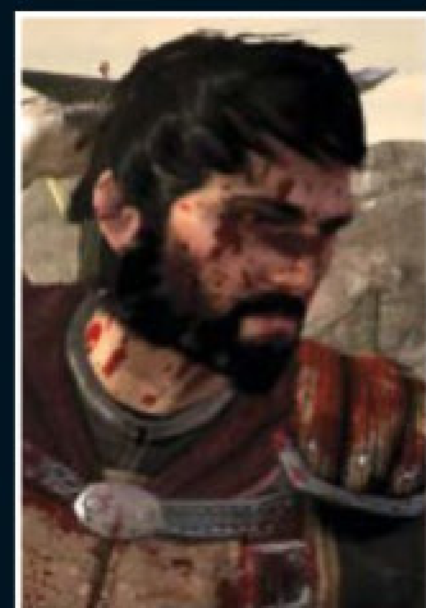
Odds on her return **10/1**



5 Flemeth

In one of *Dragon Age II*'s only connections to *Origins*, Morrigan's mother turns up to tell Hawke about the shifts of power in the world. If Morrigan is playing a key role in Inquisition, then her interfering, secretly-a-dragon mum can't be too far behind.

Odds on her return **7/1**



6 Hawke

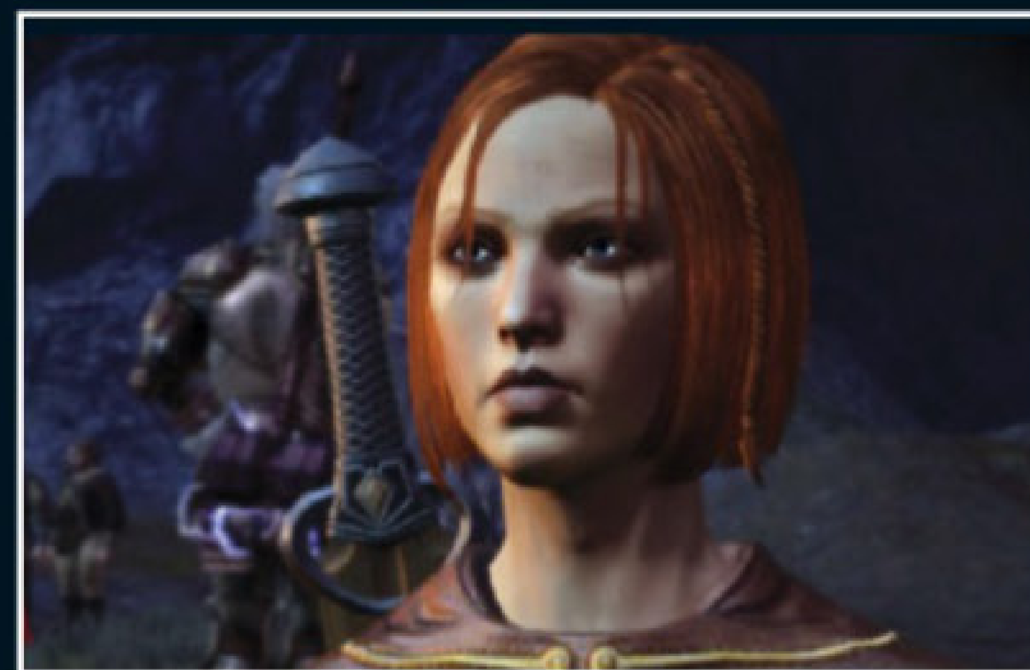
There's no reason Hawke can't leave Kirkwall now that the city is sorted out. Or maybe Hawke can never leave. If they run from Kirkwall's borders, will they just end up back there? A return seems unlikely; this story was resolved in *Dragon Age II*.

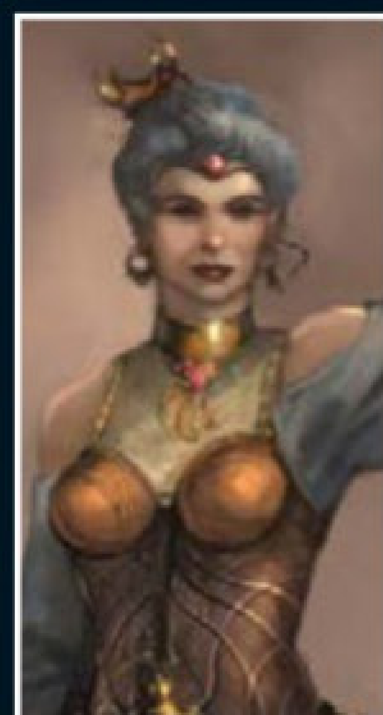
Odds on their return **50/1**

7 Leliana

Orlesian (which seems to mean 'French' in *Dragon Age*) songstress Leliana lives on post-*Dragon Age II* in the expanded fiction, and there's no reason she can't reappear again as a supporting character in *Inquisition* for a tune or two.

Odds on her return **8/1**





8 Wynne

Apparently Wynne died in an expanded universe book we've never read (and probably never will read). In a more specific non-canonical way, however, we didn't like Wynne's attitude when we first met her at the Magi Tower in *Origins* and had her offed immediately.

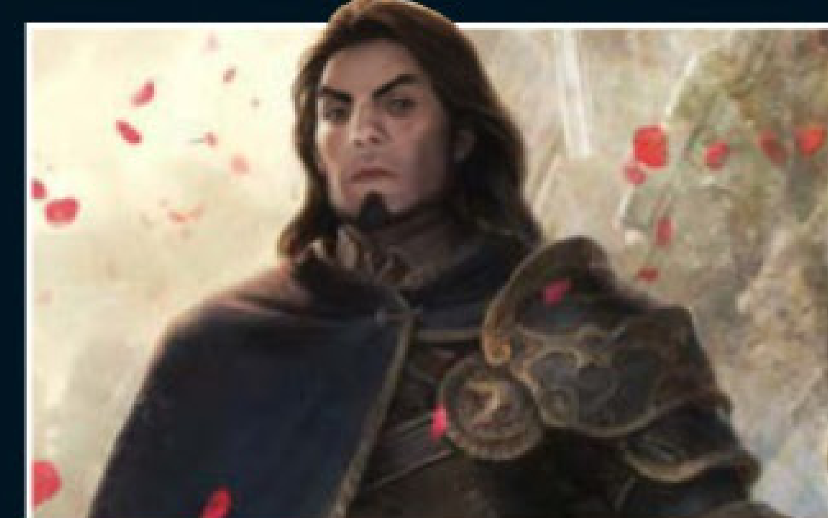
Odds on her return **10,000/1**

9 Merrill

In our playthrough of *Dragon Age II*, we went out of our way to alienate the only nice character of the bunch, Merrill, by showing a deliberately dickish lack of respect for her beliefs. As she's appeared in both *Origins* and *DAII*, we expect her to return.

Odds on her return **14/1**





10 The Grey Warden

At some point, the Grey Warden, hero of Ferelden, having impregnated Morrigan (maybe, and only if you're male), has to figure back into the arc of *Dragon Age*. Could *Inquisition* be that time? Visually, we'd be intrigued to see how that would be handled.

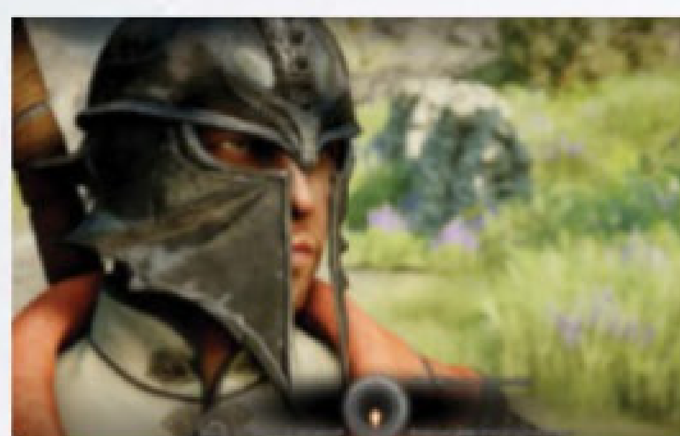
Odds on their return **20/1**

of archers and have the option to step in if you wish, even if you've already said that you'll maintain the keep in the hands of the Inquisition. The choice is not simply limited to choosing a dialogue option, it would appear, which offers enormous creative potential for *Inquisition*'s decision-making as a whole.

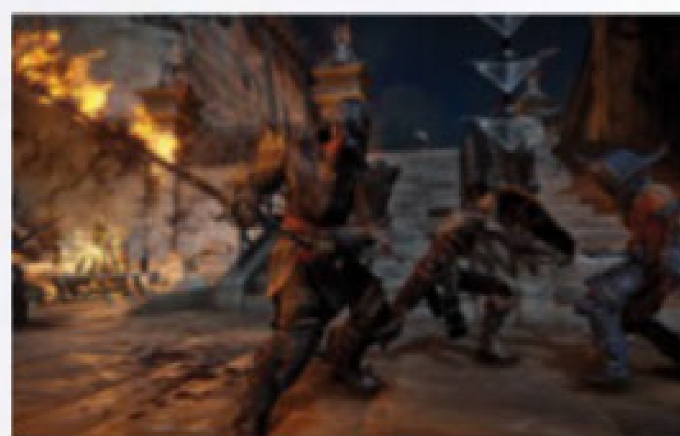
Lee thinks it's the next stage of storytelling in BioWare's games. "Dialogue wheels and dialogue choice will always play a role in what we do," Lee explains. "We're a narrative company and that's our DNA – but you want to immerse players in a world more and more, particularly with the gen four stuff which is really beautiful, lush, big forests [and so on]... And when you're given that level of immersion from a visual perspective, you want the story to be able to match that, and so being able to sure, talk to people, make a decision, but if I change my mind, I can actually just go and do it. It is cool and it's a challenge, but I think we'll see more of that going forward."

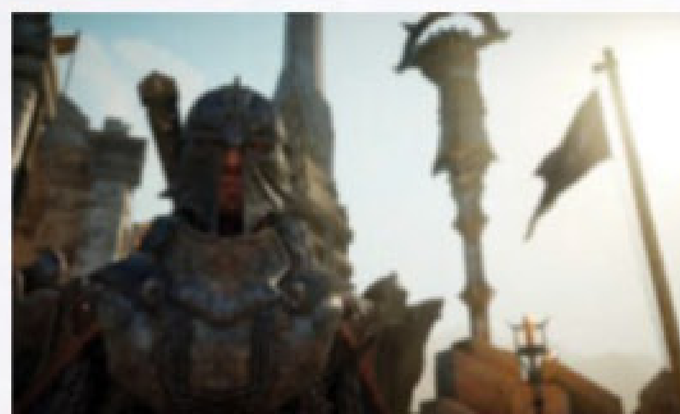
When the player returns later on to Crestwood, the entire town has been wiped out and Varric, grief-stricken, is clearly upset by the result of the player's actions. Yet it wasn't quite morally clear cut – what would happen if you stayed with the wounded but left the village to die and lost the keep? There are different elements to weigh up, here, not least the individual impressions of your party towards you, which has always been a crucial differentiation between *Dragon Age* and the morality-driven *Mass Effect*. Crestwood is now wiped out, and the ramifications of that will be long-standing, according to BioWare.

What impressed was how cinematically this was framed; a dark, wide panning shot of an entire village slaughtered while Varric's feelings were telegraphed just through his detailed expressions. From vaguely troll-like unmoving clay figurine in *Dragon Age II* to a fully expressive character displaying obvious horror in *Inquisition*, there's a dimension of convincing cinematic presentation here that simply does not exist in the same way within BioWare's current-gen output.



■ The Inquisitor. Dialogue wheels look pretty much the same, but facial expressions and presentation have stepped up.







■ *Dragon Age: Inquisition* has spectacle in the way that the previous games only really had in a few select moments.



"Because your actions have a huge impact on the followers, something we've always done in BioWare games is the followers reacting to your decisions, they're loyal to you," explains cinematic director Jonathan Perry. "In Varric's case, he's really loyal to you in *Dragon Age II* as Hawke, and hopefully as the Inquisitor in *Dragon Age: Inquisition*. Oftentimes he'll do as he's told or what he feels is best, but he has strong feelings about it either way, and we wanted to show that reaction in these cutscenes, excited, happy or sad based on what you're doing."

That impresses, certainly, when you think about the potential of cinematic framing and animation married to BioWare's choice-based narrative design. Yet those production values don't just benefit these instances, either – sometimes it's simply about spectacle, like when the dragon turns up in a moment of *Skyrim*-challenging colossal drama, screams and then takes off again, all in real-time while we're sat there wondering where you'd even start bringing something like that to the ground.

"I think one of the approaches with *Dragon Age: Inquisition*, to kind of mirror the open world feel of the game, is we really want to have a lot of cool things happen around you without grabbing the camera or forcing the perspective to see that stuff happening." Perry explains. "We really want to create this sense that the world is happening around you, whether you're there or not, so things like the dragon crashing in – it's a lot more powerful as an ambient event. It's a little more work but I think it's certainly worth it. It can be difficult to attract players' attention to that, so they're not looking at a plant or something, so there's a lot of work with the level designers to make sure we direct players' attention towards events."

Speaking of the dragon, it appears in a desert-based environment called Western Approach, which really wouldn't look out of place in *Red Dead Redemption*. Expect every kind of environment to be represented in some fashion – on the map screen, we see snowy tundra and swampland, while another environment we're shown has an enormous lake in the middle of some British-looking highlands. On the surface of the lake floats a beautiful northern lights-looking demonic entity, and buildings in the distance imply there's a lot out there to be found – yet BioWare pigeonholes this and the Western Approach as mid-sized environments, so expect some of the largest ones to really challenge the maestros of the open world genre out there right now.

It quite clearly exceeds anything we've seen in *Dragon Age*'s truncated hub worlds, and exploring them is actually optional – BioWare's entire philosophies on environmental design had to change to meet the challenge, as Cameron Lee tells us. "BioWare games have pretty much always »

"On the map screen, we see snowy tundra and swampland, while another environment we're shown has an enormous lake in the middle of some highlands"

been about story, and they still are in *Dragon Age: Inquisition*. What we've been able to do in this game is broaden that story out through the use of those open, very large areas that are exploration-focused and optional, so it is a challenge to be able to create content that players can interact with if they want to and have that flow back through into the main story and influence it in some way. So we had to build a number of systems to make all sorts of content, we had to put more hooks in to support the back-and-forth of the story, and the significant impact of making your mark on that world."

This is expressed in both small and large ways – BioWare casually mentions that burning ships by the afore-mentioned lake will slow reinforcements from the Red Templars. Yet a better example of the player expression ideas in *Dragon Age* comes in the form of keeps, which are strongholds that the player can first take from occupying factions and later kit out to suit their needs. Earning them lets you affect the surrounding environment in different ways. Before we get to that, however, let's go through the process of actually taking one, itself a task that offers numerous possibilities to reach the end result.



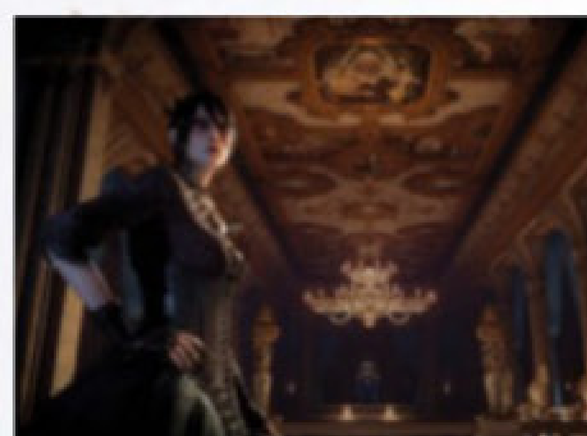
IN THIS CASE, BIOWARE EXPLAINED HOW IT HAD ALREADY POISONED THE WATER SUPPLY BEFOREHAND AND FALSELY LURED OUT TROOPS TO WEAR DOWN THE FORCES INSIDE. There are different ways you can infiltrate the walls of this occupied fortress, since the front gate is locked: get Varric to climb over and open it for you, use some tunnels beneath to sneak in or, as we were shown in the demo, Cassandra can smash the gate to pieces and you can charge in the

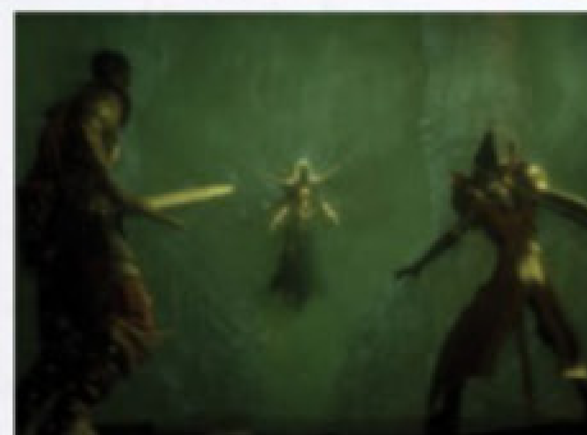
"THE COMBAT LOOKS A LOT MORE ENERGETIC THAN PREVIOUS GAMES IN TERMS OF ELABORATE SPELL AND PHYSICAL COMBAT ANIMATIONS, YET WE'RE SOON DEMONSTRATED IT YEARNS TO BE AS TACTICAL AS ORIGINS WAS"

front entrance. From here, you fight until the area is cleared – the combat looks a lot more energetic than previous games in terms of elaborate spell and physical combat animations, yet we're soon demonstrated it yearns to be as tactical as *Origins* was.

Environments can be destroyed: a wooden bridge holding a whole group of enemy archers is brought smashing to the ground, taking them out. More importantly, tactical mode from *Origins* on PC returns, this time on all formats. "We wanted to get the best of both worlds out of it," says Lee, explaining how the combat from both *Origins* and its sequel are brought together. The battles feel like the most familiar part of *Inquisition* revealed so far with that in mind. "The tactical combat is a strength, a staple of the franchise, and we wanted to return to that in a really strong way. We wanted to bring into it, we wanted to temper it with a more physical feel, so more weight behind the animations and if you're carrying a two-handed sword, we want you to feel like you're carrying a two-handed sword... We want to be more tactical, but we understand also that some players want to get in there and be part of the combat a little bit more – it's catering to both."

This now means you can control Varric and company via an almost bird's eye view-like interface, taking a step back from actually fighting yourself and watching the





WE DO WONDER HOW THIS WILL END UP LOOKING ON XBOX 360 AND PLAYSTATION 3 CONSIDERING THE DETAIL.



encounters play out, choosing where to place the dwarf to supply long-range support while Vivienne lays down powerful spells from a distance, as your character and Cassandra charge into the fray. There's an intended depth here alongside the more instantaneous, satisfying combat from *Dragon Age II* that can only help answer criticism of the franchise.

Post-capture, the keep can then be customised according to your preferences – you can focus your keep around certain attributes, kitting it out for war, commerce, espionage or whatever suits you. The keep's appearance will change depending on what you've decided to focus on, and be populated with your own NPCs. From this keep you can use your agents to perform certain acts in the surrounding areas, like rebuilding a colossus to increase morale or mining for sulphur. In this regard, agents are treated as a resource – so you need a certain number to actually do these things, but it rewards your long-term efforts with nice rewards, and even unlocking part of the environments in some cases. In the case of the sulphur pits, for example, that unlocks sulphur as an alchemy resource and opens up a cave that was initially closed off.

And here's the kicker: no player will be able to see 100 per cent of *Dragon Age: Inquisition*'s environment in one



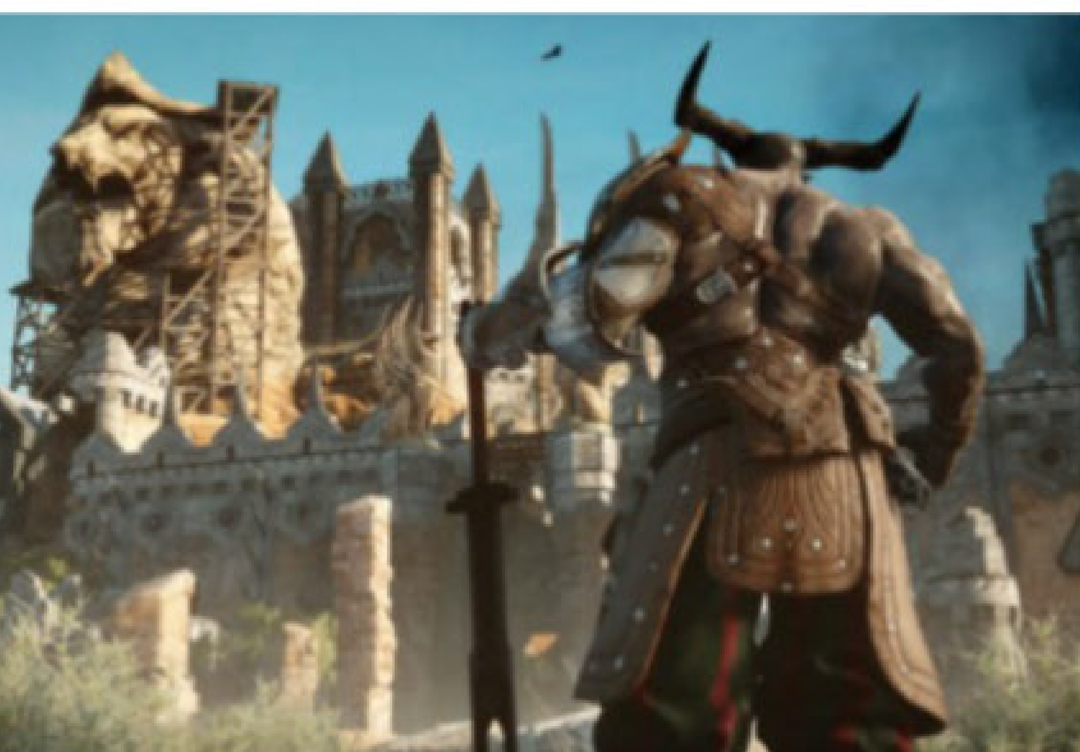
The combat, on the surface, looks like it has more in common with *Dragon Age II* than *Origins*, but tactical mode will change large encounters completely.

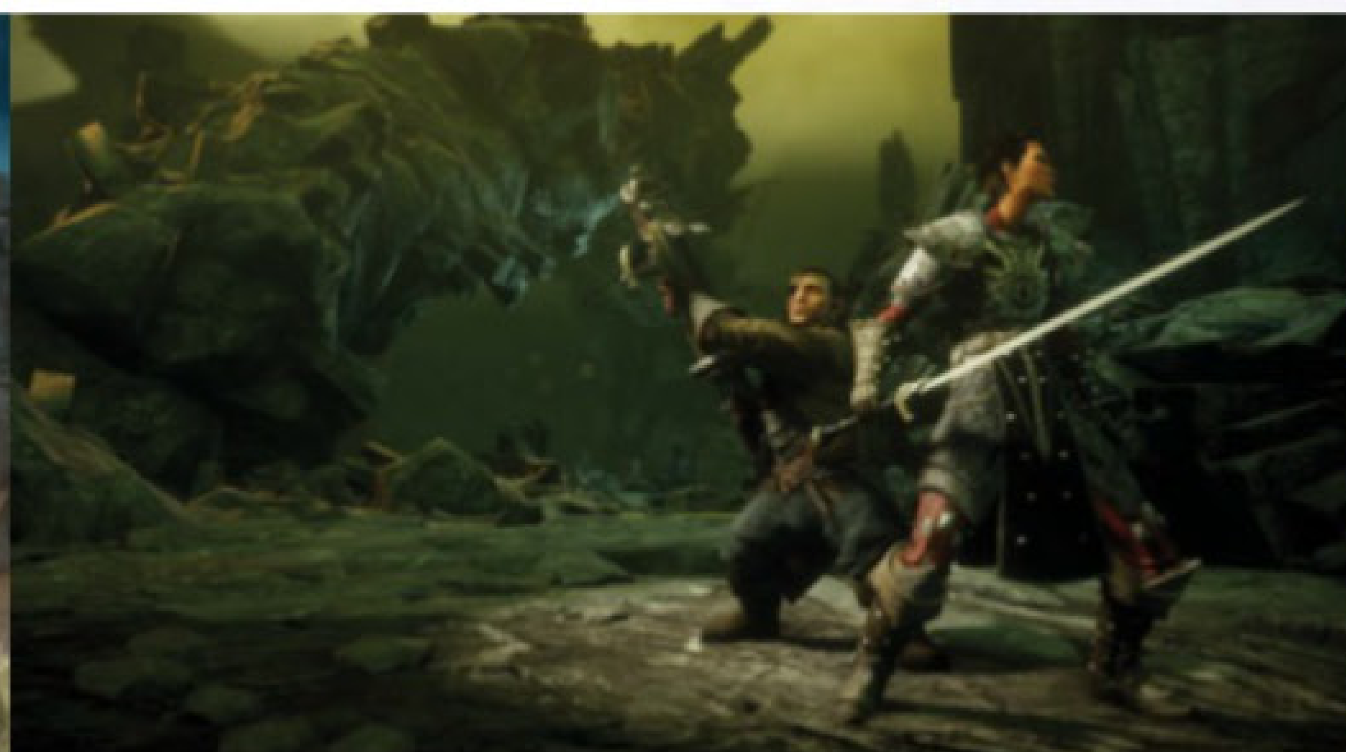
game will be the same. We don't want to limit people just because they haven't bought the new consoles this time round, so we want to make sure you have the same experience across the board, but the gen four players will definitely have a richer, more detailed experience."

There are no hints that *Inquisition* looks like anything but a next-gen game – the world is huge and the Frostbite 3 tech allows for the best visual effects the franchise has seen to date. *Dragon Age* never exactly had a reputation as the prettiest of games; expect that to change.

Inquisition looks like the kind of sequel you're hoping to see on next-gen consoles – a by-product of a developer challenging itself to do better after a sequel met with a mixed reception, even if *Dragon Age II* was a more than worthy experiment from the RPG specialists. This third entry's first showing demonstrates a willing from BioWare to reinvent the franchise with each instalment, an approach that can surely only be creatively healthy for this high fantasy saga. That magnificent dragon's fiery debut was a statement of ambition for BioWare to reclaim this genre from *The Witcher* and *Skyrim*, and it's an open world arms race that should only please each series' most ardent fans. If you felt burned by BioWare after *Dragon Age II*, it's clearly determined to win you back. 

Dragon Age: Inquisition will be released on Xbox 360, PS3, Xbox One, PS4 and PC in late 2014.





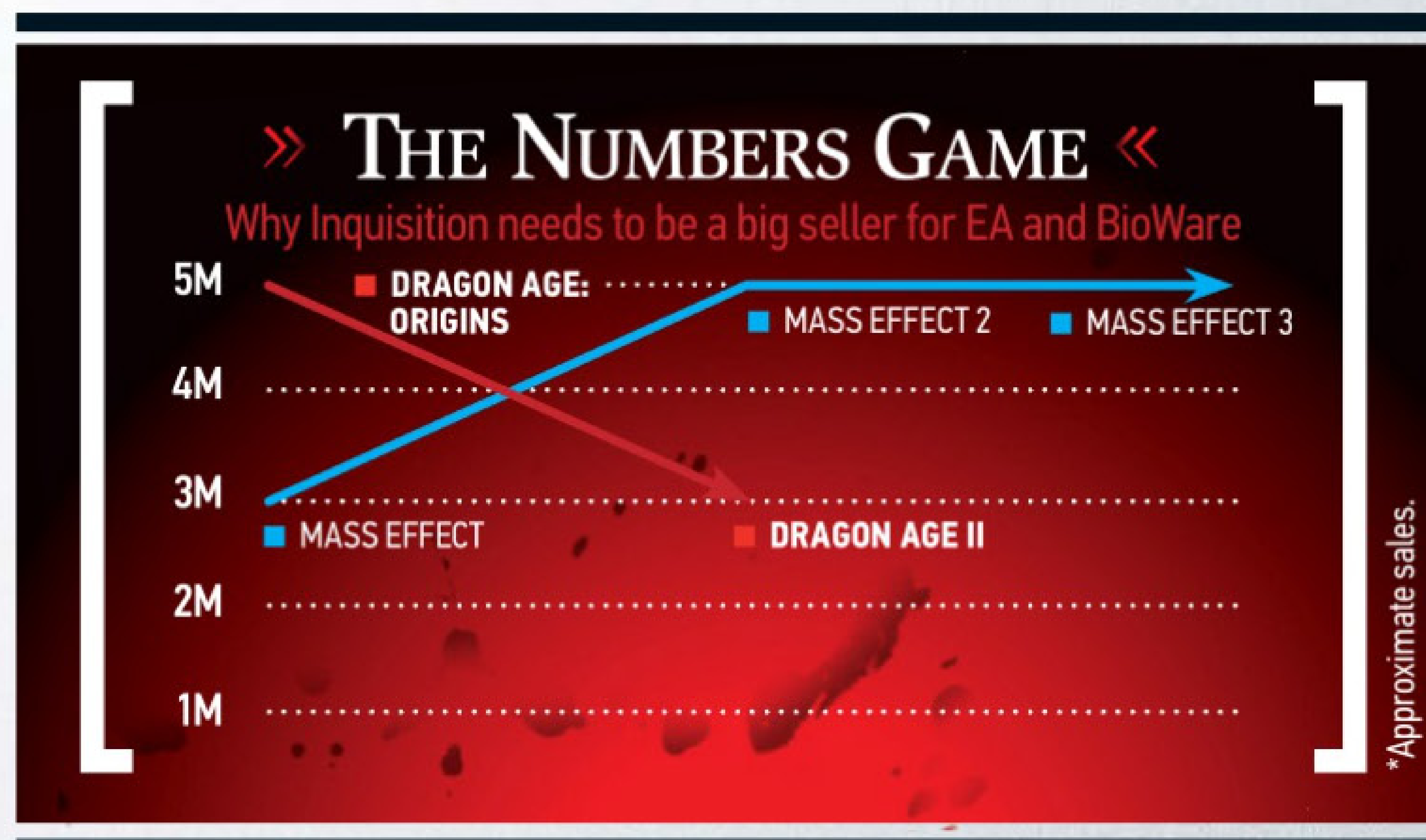


We ain't in Kirkwall anymore. Indeed, you could probably fit all of *Dragon Age II*'s main city in this one screenshot.

playthrough. "No. No they couldn't," explains Lee. "There are significant areas, there are significant decisions that you have to make in the course of the game, and some of those will be exclusive content for those choices. Some of those smaller pieces like you saw with the keep, a player could see all those small ones, but they'd have to invest a significant amount of time in building up resources and agents. But some of the bigger ones? Definitely not."

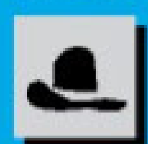
The keeps, then, offer so much gameplay potential that has never been explored in BioWare games to date. They are entities of your choices – and Lee teases that they won't be the limits of your self-expression in Inquisition. "We'll get into a lot of detail about that later on."

Despite coming to current gen as well, *Dragon Age: Inquisition* looks most at home on next-gen. "The differences you're going to see right now, it's mostly that level of immersion I was referring to," Lee explains. "The fidelity of the world, we can populate the world to a greater degree on gen four. Saying that, the core experience of the



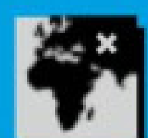
35 TOP FREE-TO-PLAY GAMES

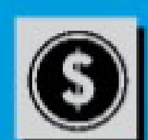
PAY FOR

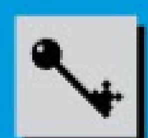

VANITY ITEMS


WEAPONS/ PERKS


SPEED/ SHORTCUT


EXTRA LEVELS

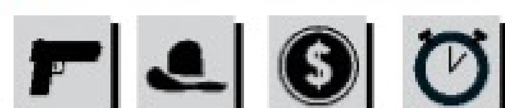

IN-GAME CURRENCY


GAME UNLOCK

Since the games industry embraced apps as an acceptable way of gaming, business models employed by mobile developers have begun to spread into the console and desktop markets. Free-to-play – abbreviated to F2P – is being touted by a slew of publishers as the 'future of gaming'. Allowing developers to make money through in-app purchases, or convincing gamers to subscribe to the game after a try-before-you-buy inspired trial period, free-to-play is a paradigm shift the industry is in the middle of understanding. To help chart this emerging landscape, games™ rounded up the most notable games in the free-to-play market...

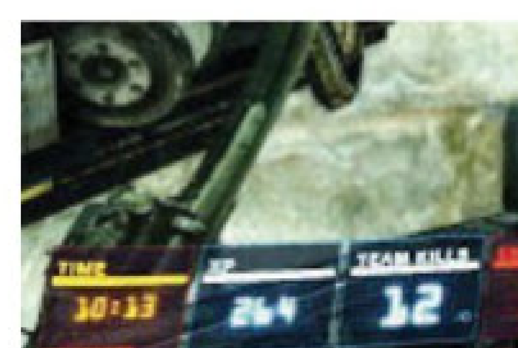
1 HAWKEN

PC, Adhesive Games



The debut title from Adhesive Games, *Hawken* is a multi-player FPS that really captures the feeling of piloting fast-paced mecha colossi. All four competitive modes are available free, but if you want to upgrade to the bigger, badder mechs, that's when *Hawken* will start costing you.







2 THE SIMPSONS: TAPPED OUT

iOS/Android, EA Mobile

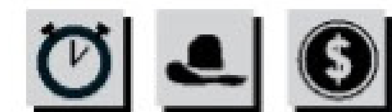


Due to its incredible popularity, the city-building game based on Fox's hit animation actually broke EA's servers after its iOS launch. Progress is steady but slow if you play without paying, so if you want to build a worthy Springfield you'll have to be either very patient or very rich.



3 FARMVILLE

Browser, Zynga



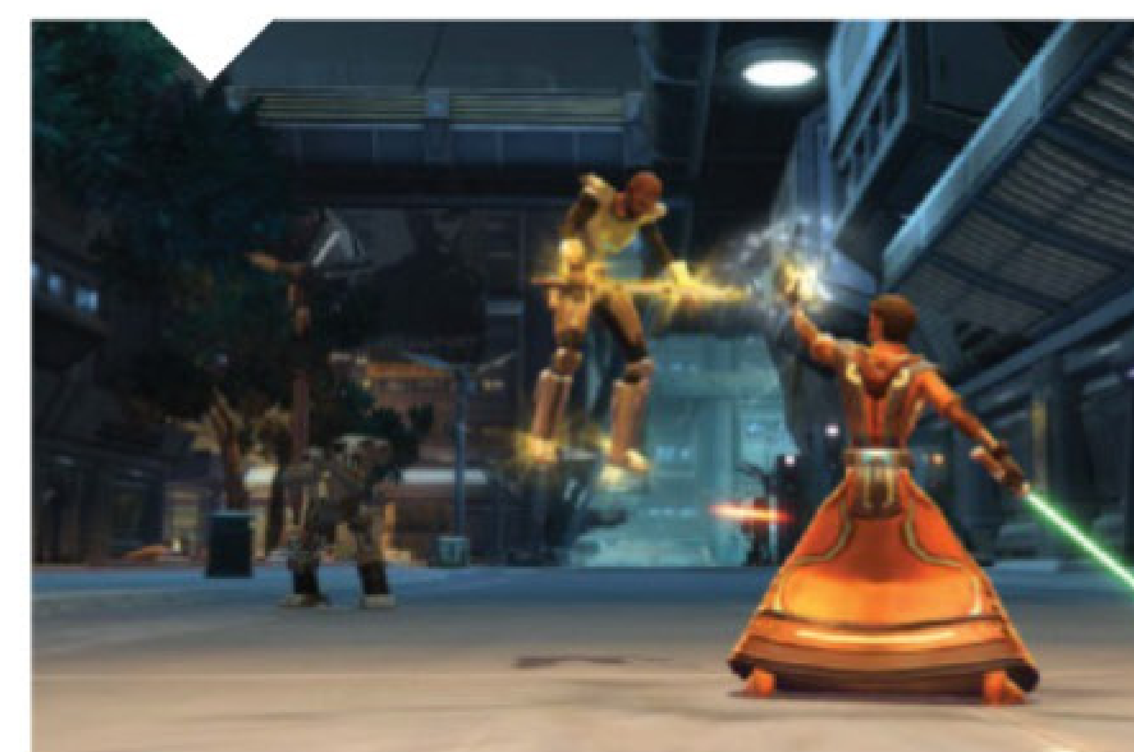
A game that needs no introduction, the farming-simulation social networking phenomenon took the world by storm in 2009. It seemed like all of our Facebook friends were playing this at one point, and the sheer weight of requests and notifications made even the most stubborn anti-F2P gamer cave in and start harvesting virtual corn.

4 STAR WARS: THE OLD REPUBLIC

PC, BioWare

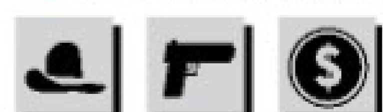


After the subscriber base fell below one million players in July 2012, EA took the plunge and made *SWTOR* free-to-play. The transition saved the game from going under, but at the cost of imposing credit limits on players and slowing down the speed at which they level up.



5 LEAGUE OF LEGENDS

PC/Mac, Riot Games



Perhaps the most famous MOBA going, *LOL* boasts over 12 million players signing in per day, and has clocked over 1.3 *billion* hours cumulative playtime. Built on a freemium and free-to-play model, the game makes its money through microtransactions that work to power up the player's Summoner – the game's persistent element.



6 DOTA 2

PC/Mac, Valve

Valve is smart. With *Dota 2*, they maintained the same game design and balance the franchise was known for while they simultaneously introduced an in-game store that allowed the purchase of equipment, tools, couriers and other cosmetic items. *Dota 2* also allows players to design their own items to offer for sale through the store, the creators of which receive a percentage of the sales of anything sold. *Dota 2* has mastered the freemium model – every aspect of the game is customisable, from the HUD to your player character. By continually offering new updates, Valve is keeping *Dota 2* both consistently profitable and engaging for loyal players.





7 PLANETSIDE 2

PC, Sony Online Entertainment

PlanetSide 2 is a feat of online gaming. With servers that are capable of holding up to 2000 players at once, the game can deliver some of the most epic MMOFPS experiences you're able to achieve on PC. The persistent world is locked in a state of perpetual warfare, and is popularised by players that can spend money on the cosmetic upgrades available through premium content. You can play this game without hitting a paywall, and it's a testament to Sony Online's skill as a developer that you never have to pay to win, making this an excellent example of when F2P works.

8 WORLD OF TANKS

PC/Xbox 360, Wargaming.net

Last year, Belarusian company Wargaming.net announced its revenue was €217.9 million – the vast majority of which was made through the insanely popular *World Of Tanks*. The game makes its money by offering premium tanks for paying customers to use and upgrade.





11 ZUMA BLITZ

Browser, PopCap

Repurposing the popular frog-based franchise into a frenetic Facebook game with minute-long rounds, pay-to-use perks and an emphasis on inter-friend leaderboards, *Zuma Blitz* coaxes you into paying for idols in its store to aid you in smashing your friends' high-scores.

9 RUNESCAPE

Browser, Jagex Games Studios

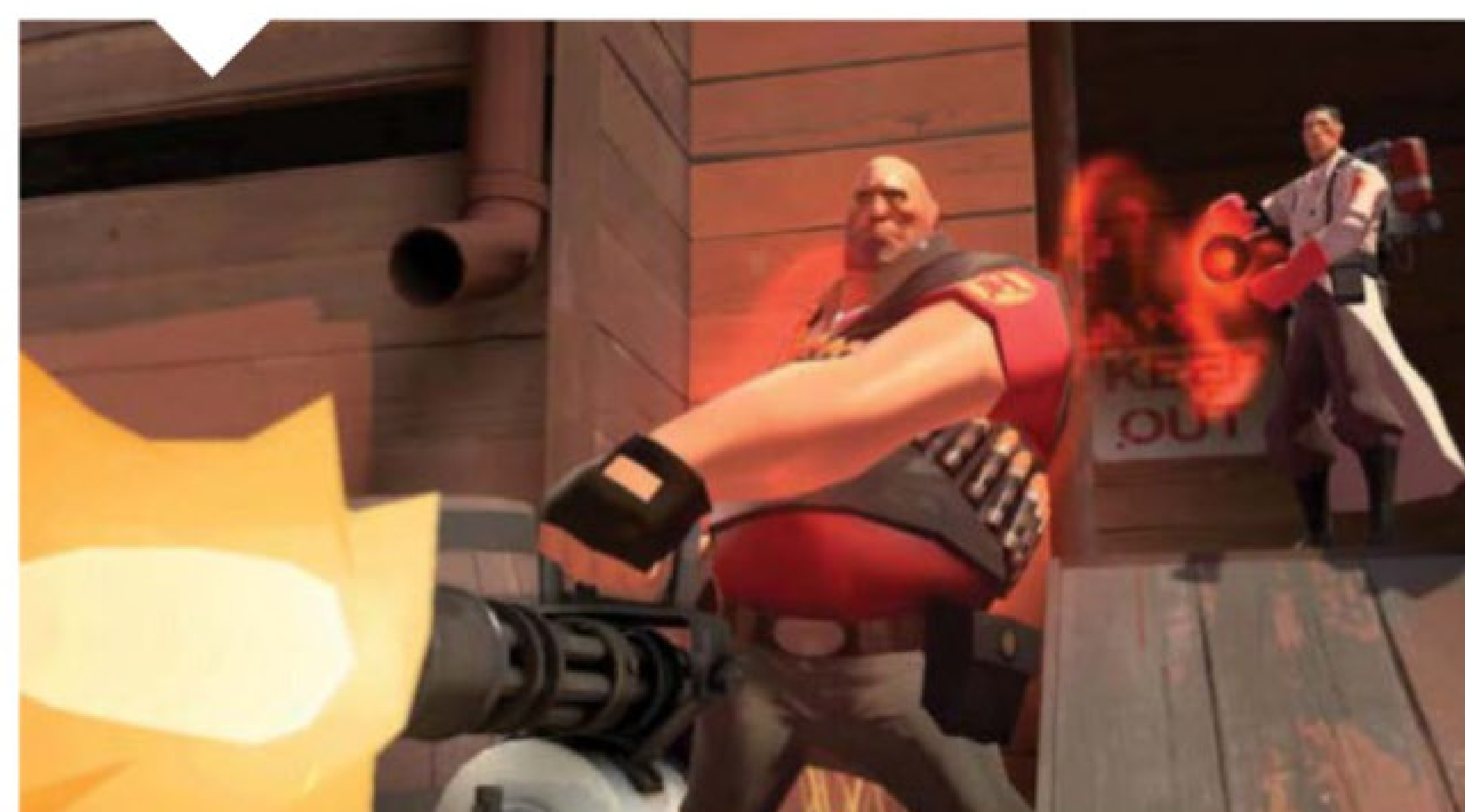
Built by a British developer, *RuneScape* is recognized by the Guinness World Records as the world's largest free MMORPG. Having been online since 2001, *RuneScape* has gathered an extensive and loyal fanbase. F2P, the game promotes premium membership by limiting access to forums to paying members, and – more interestingly – banned members can buy themselves back into the game with real-world money. *RuneScape* has had consistent trouble with players mining gold in-game and selling it on for real world money: one of the biggest problems with games taking on this model.



10 TEAM FORTRESS 2

PC/Mac/Xbox 360/PS3, Valve

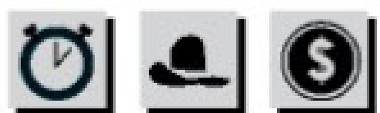
Available across a lot of platforms, the only real free-to-play iteration of the game is presented through Steam, ie it's only free-to-play on PC and Mac. Making the switch to free-to-play was a fantastic choice for Valve's quirky team-based shooter: figures reveal that *Team Fortress 2*'s revenue increased twelvefold after the transition. Crazy to think most of that money comes from hats.





12 SUPER MONDAY NIGHT COMBAT

PC, Uber Entertainment



Inspired by the original *DOTA*, *Super Monday Night Combat* is a hybrid of multiplayer online battle arena games and *Team Fortress 2*. The third-person shooter has a heavy tactical element and is framed in an inspired futuristic game-show setting. As with most F2P MOBAs, premium content comes in the guise of cosmetic items.



13 DC UNIVERSE ONLINE

PC/PS3, Sony Online Entertainment



Starting off with a subscription model that cost £9.99 per month, *DC Universe Online* went free to play on 1 November 2011. The game operates on tiered levels – Free, Premium (having spent $5+ on the game) and Legendary – a moniker given only if you still want to opt for a subscription.



14 AUTO CLUB REVOLUTION

Browser, Eutechnyx



The browser-based online racing game has a target audience of devoted petrolheads: a simulator more akin to *Forza* than an arcade-y *Need For Speed*-alike, *Auto Club Revolution* has some superb community features – being able to share stats about real-world cars and sharing your favourite driving music to name but a few.



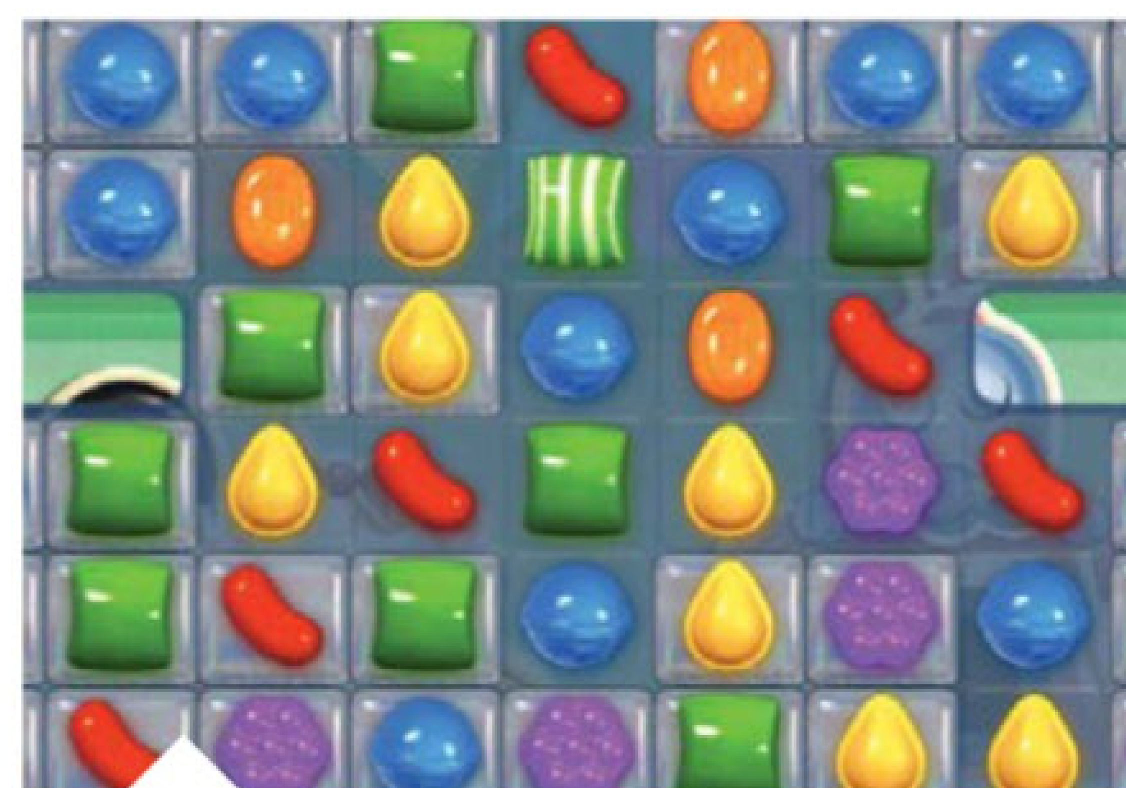
15 CLASH OF CLANS

iOS, Supercell



This online multiplayer strategy game is the casual gamer's answer to *Age Of Empires*, and pits players against each other across all iOS devices. You can play this game for free if you want, but gold can also be bought in-app to allow quicker expansion of your cities.





16 CANDY CRUSH SAGA

Browser/iOS/Android, King.com



The incredibly addictive swap-three game had humble beginnings as a King.com timed puzzler, but adopting the 'Saga' suffix launched the game to astronomical heights – everyone we know is now playing it (albeit almost against their will). Here's a tip, though: you're given five lives that take 30 minutes each to recharge. If you use them all up, just set your devices clock forward two and a half hours, and voila: five free lives!

17 TEMPLE RUN 2

iOS/Android, Imangi Studios



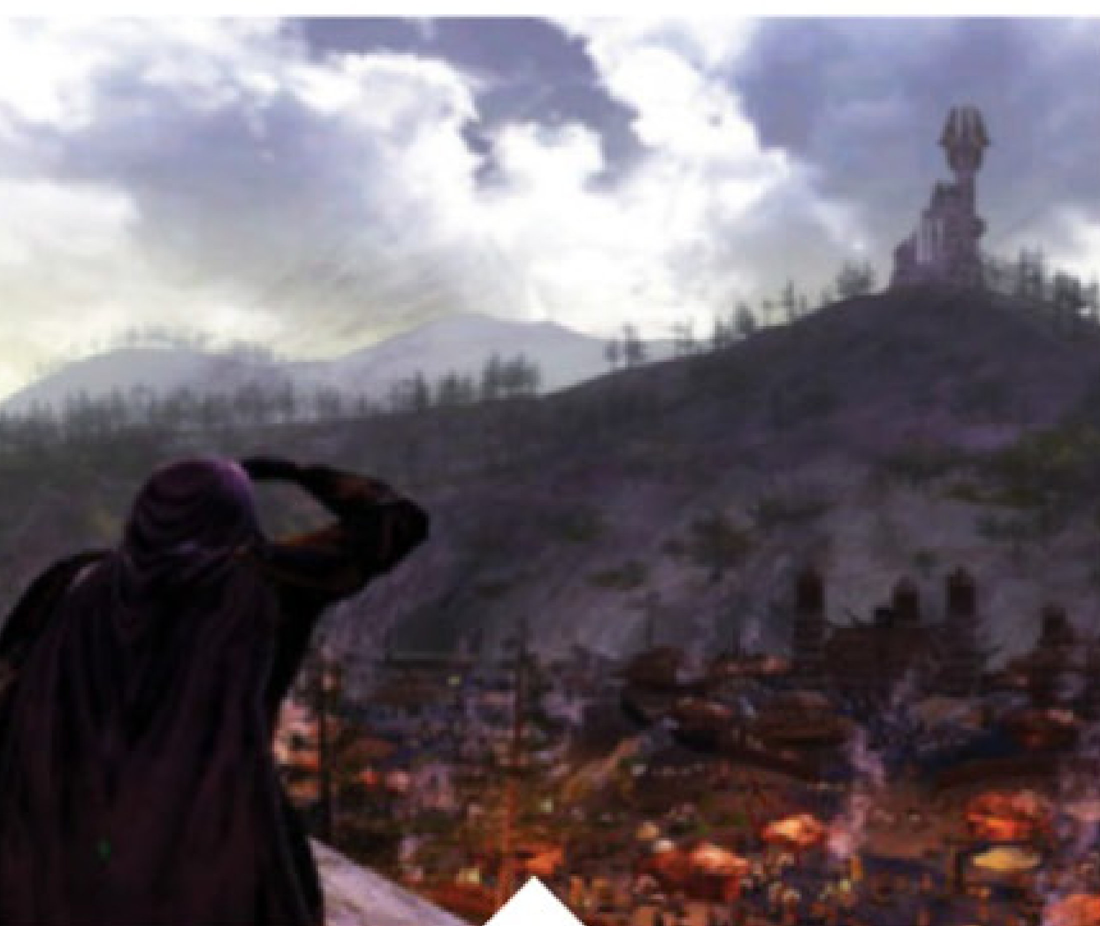
Perhaps the most famous franchise in the endless running genre – and certainly the most addictive – *Temple Run* was one of the first truly sensational apps to grace the App Store and Play Store. Monetised gameplay comes from paying for gems that can unlock extra power-ups, extra lives or extra characters to run as.



18 WORLD OF WARCRAFT
PC/Mac, Blizzard Entertainment

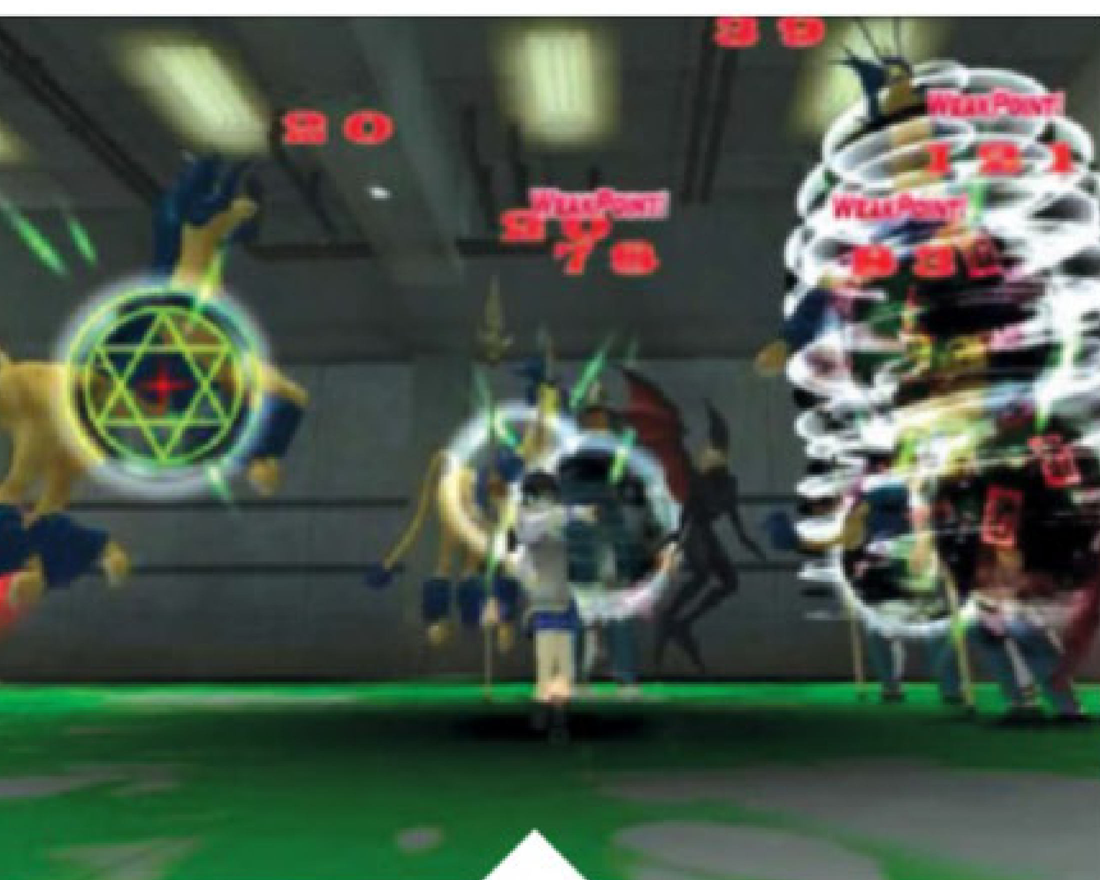
While only the *Starter Edition* of the game is available for free, it still gives you a great taste of the world of Azeroth. The sampler is designed to get you hooked, though, and won't let you grow past level 20, hold more than 10 gold, trade with other players or join guilds. Still, there's a lot you can do for free before the level cap.





19 THE LORD OF THE RINGS ONLINE
PC, Turbine Inc.

One of the most resounding successes of the free-to-play MMORPG, *LOTRO* more than tripled its revenue when it decided to drop its $15 per month subscription charge. The core of the game is completely free, but Turbine charges players that want to play additional quest packs.



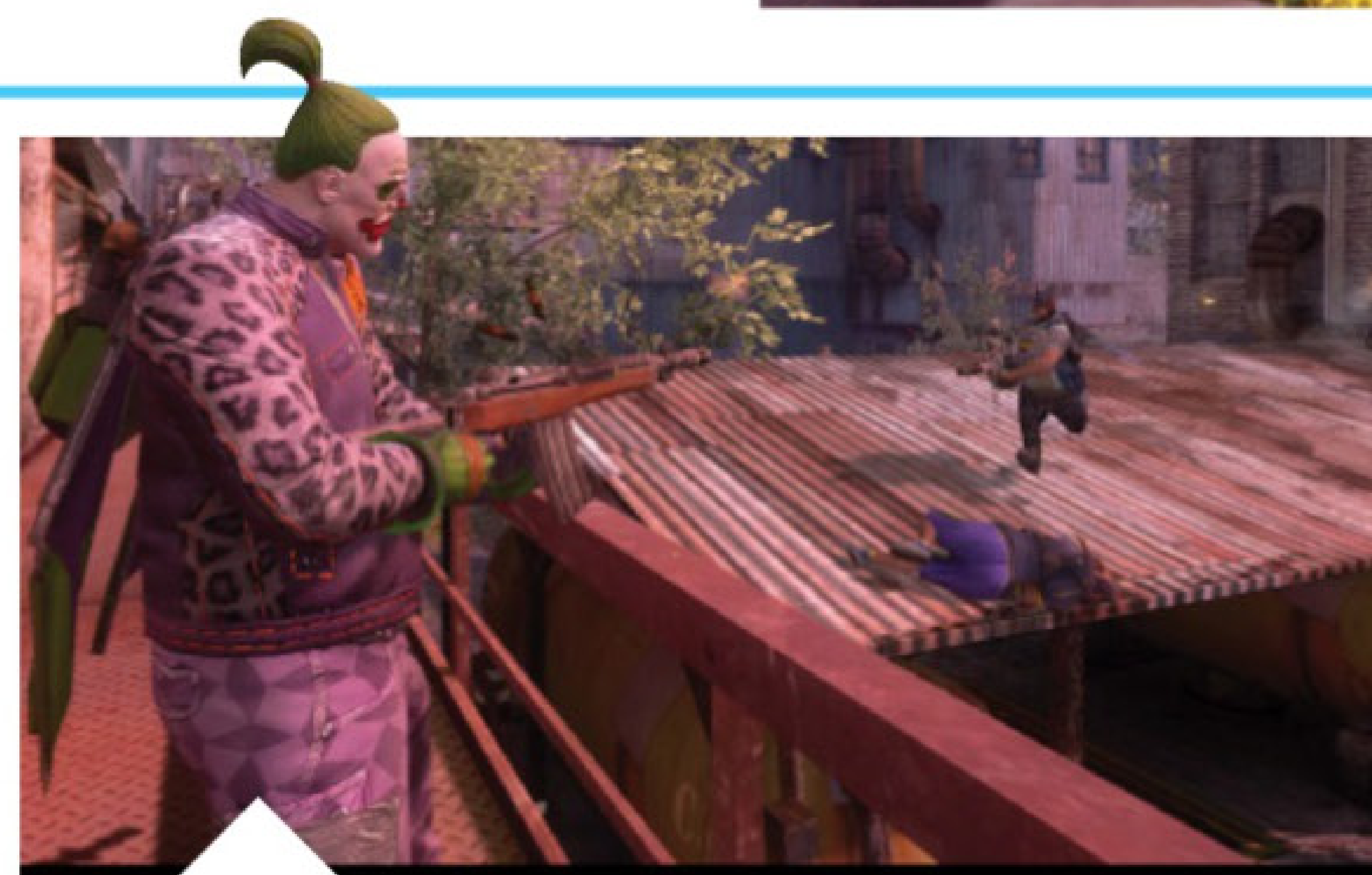
20 SHIN MEGAMI TENSEI: IMAGINE
PC, Cave

Following the series' tradition of opting for a neutral, chaos or law alignment, players can dive deep into the *MegaTen* world of post-apocalyptic Tokyo to hunt down demonic forces that are threatening all human life. There is a lot of grind in the game, but items can be bought with real-world money to allow the player to master skills more rapidly.

21 BEJEWELED BLITZ
PC/Mac/Android/iOS, PopCap

The minute-long gameplay of *Bejeweled Blitz* took the formula of its predecessor and improved upon it by rewarding players for thinking ahead of the board and matching similar jewels as quickly as humanly possible to create chains and combos. Upgrades can be bought with real money that allow quicker swaps or extra time.



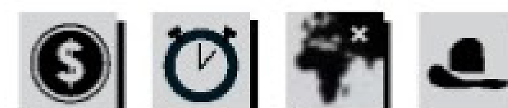


22 GOTHAM CITY IMPOSTORS
PC/Xbox 360/PS3, Monolith Productions

In a game that pits Batman-inspired vigilantes (the Bats) against drug-addled Joker wannabes, *Gotham City Imposters* went free-to-play on Steam on 30 August 2011. The game features core gameplay based around gadget-warfare and FPS mechanics, and generates revenue by charging for between $1 and $5 for additional weapons, skins and items.

23 COMMAND & CONQUER: TIBERIUM ALLIANCES
Browser, EA Phenomic





Continuing the battle between the Global Defense Initiative and the Brotherhood of Nod, *Tiberium Alliances* works best if you form coalitions with other players and pool resources to build the best base you can. There's a slight paywall a little way in, but if you enjoy the gameplay and the *C&C* world this can easily be overlooked.

AUDACIOUS APPS

Some developers take liberties when it comes to charging for in-app content, and we've got the worst offenders rounded-up below

Playmobil Pirates Gameloft



■ An app meant primarily for younger players, one cosmetic item on offer is a pirate ship labelled at £27.99. After receiving complaints from parents, an official investigation into the practice of advertising in-app purchases to children was instigated.

Real Racing 3 EA Swiss Sarl



■ The racing sim has a purchasable car worth £69.99 – the Koenigsegg Agera R costs 800 coins; the equivalent of eight months' grinding in-game. Its real-world equivalent is $2 million, though, and you'd have to grind longer than eight months to afford that.

My Little Pony: Friendship is Magic Gameloft



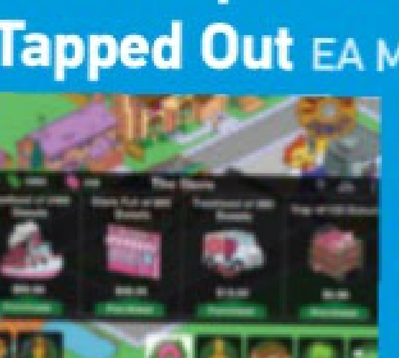
■ It's never wise to anger Bronies, but Gameloft managed to do it by charging a *huge* amount for access to fan-favourite characters, such as Princess Luna's Royal Guards for 800 gems (roughly £41.98).

Frontline Commando Glu



■ The most expensive item in the shooter is the £34.99 'The Gravedigger Sniper Rifle'. Although to be fair it has perfect accuracy, infinite ammo, and pretty much kills in one hit… talk about pay-to-win.

The Simpsons: Tapped Out EA Mobile



■ If you're fed up of the daily grind and tapping on every denizen of Springfield over and over again to harvest donuts, you can always take a shortcut and buy the Boatload of 2400 Donuts for a whopping £69.99.

FREE-TO-PLAY FIGURES

In 2002, the BBC worked out an exchange rate for *EverQuest*, due to the high volume of in-game items being traded for real-world currency. Turns out the Kingdom of Norrath was the **77th** richest region in the world, above Bulgaria and just below Russia.

When you add together the hours played in World Of Warcraft, it comes to roughly **5.93 million years** – which is longer than the estimated amount of time humans have been present on the face of the Earth. Well done us.

Candy Crush Saga reportedly pulls in about **$400,000** a day, according to developer King.com. That works out roughly at **$4.7** per second, or around $146,000,000 per annum. That's still nothing when compared to Blizzard Entertainment, though, who at the peak of its MMO supremacy was raking in **$150 million** a month.

Free-to-play developers rely on players they call 'whales' to keep their games in the black. A 'whale' is a player who constantly invests huge injections of money into a F2P title. Some companies have stated the top 10 per cent of paying players contribute as much **50%** of all in-app revenue.

24 TEKKEN CARD TOURNAMENT

iOS/Android/Browser, Namco Bandai

Somewhat oddly taking the *Tekken* franchise to an AR-compatible app, *Tekken Card Tournament* takes the player-versus-player mechanics and reimagines them as a turn-based card game. Fun and quite unlike anything else we've seen in an app, *Tekken Card Tournament* has the option of scanning real-life cards into your phone to build bigger and better decks.





28 PLANTS VS. ZOMBIES 2: IT'S ABOUT TIME

iOS, PopCap

The follow-up to one of PopCap's most beloved games, *It's About Time* received a fair amount of criticism for adopting the free-to-play model (us included). However, the game is technically possible to complete without spending a single penny, and will suit certain players. The game has received 25 million downloads – more than the lifetime sales of the original title.

25 HAPPY WARS

Xbox 360, Toylogic

Happy Wars is a third-person online-only battler with an emphasis on teamwork, and was the first Xbox Live Arcade free-to-play game. *Happy Wars* took the brunt of the learning curve developers had to endure when learning the F2P ropes – due to Microsoft's purchasing policies, gamers had to first buy the now-defunct MS Points before they could acquire the in-game content.





26 QUAKE LIVE

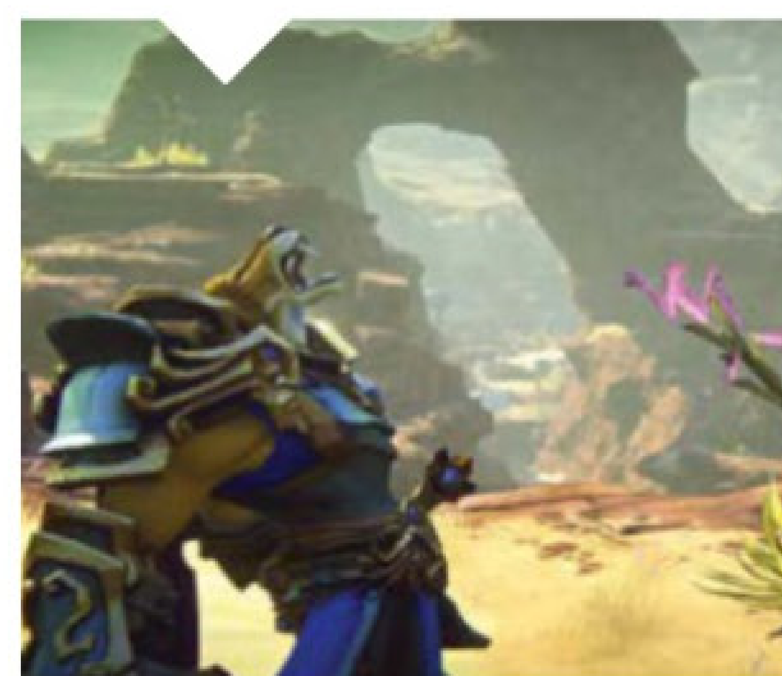
PC/Mac, iD Software

Quake Live was made profitable by the use of in-game billboards to generate advertising revenue. Once that strategy proved fruitless, the game's developers opted to introduce a subscription model to keep the game in the black. The strategy worked, and the game is still enjoying immense popularity three years after its launch.

27 EVERQUEST

PC/Mac, Sony Online Entertainment

Originally released in 1999, the fantasy MMORPG was originally a subscription-only game that – like a glut of other MMOs – made the transition to free-to-play in early 2012. With 16 playable races, a range of classes and a vibrant persistent world constantly receiving huge updates, it's no wonder *EverQuest* has received the enduring success that it has.





29 THE SIMS FREEPLAY

iOS/Android, EA Mobile

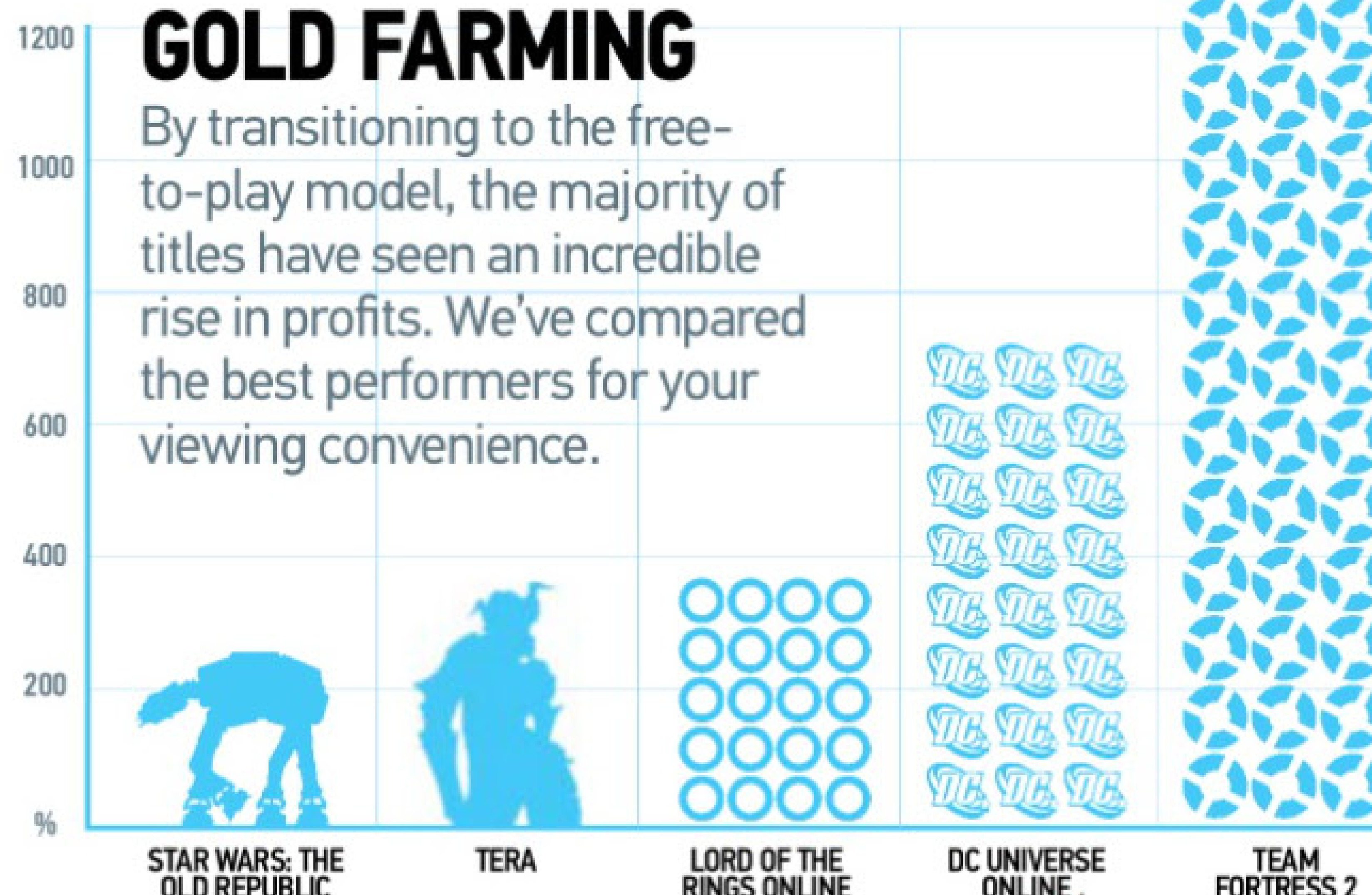
Altering the typical *Sims* gameplay by making events run in real-time, *The Sims FreePlay* is a slow-burning game if you play it without deciding to buy extra sets of in-game currency. If you choose to go in without opening your wallet, expect to spend weeks on end waiting to move up through the 52 available levels.

30 TINY TOWER
iOS/Android, Mobage

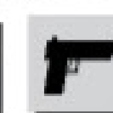
A game that really allows you to get your creative juices flowing, *Tiny Tower* involves micro-managing the construction of a tower, with floors getting more varied and more expensive the higher you climb. A loyal 8-bit homage, the game can be completed for free or making use of paid shortcuts that can quicken progress.







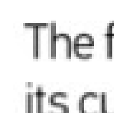
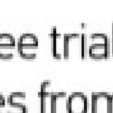
31 PUZZLES & DRAGONS
iOS/Android, GungHo Online Entertainment

Japan's most popular app, *Puzzles & Dragons* mixes addictive gameplay with attentive fan service. The game is kept alive by regular updates and events, with gameplay falling somewhere between *Pokémon* and *Bejeweled*. The app has been so popular, it's even spawning a fully-fledged 3DS sequel.

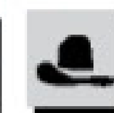


32 RIFT LITE
PC, Trion Worlds

The free trial of *Rift* takes its cues from *WOW*'s trial scheme – allowing you to level up as far as level 20 with tight restrictions on the amount of currency you can gather. *Rift* boasts the ability to let you construct your avatar to perfectly match your play style, and features cooperative play with hundreds of other players to take down huge monsters.

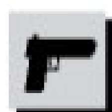
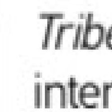
33 TERA
PC, Bluehole Studio

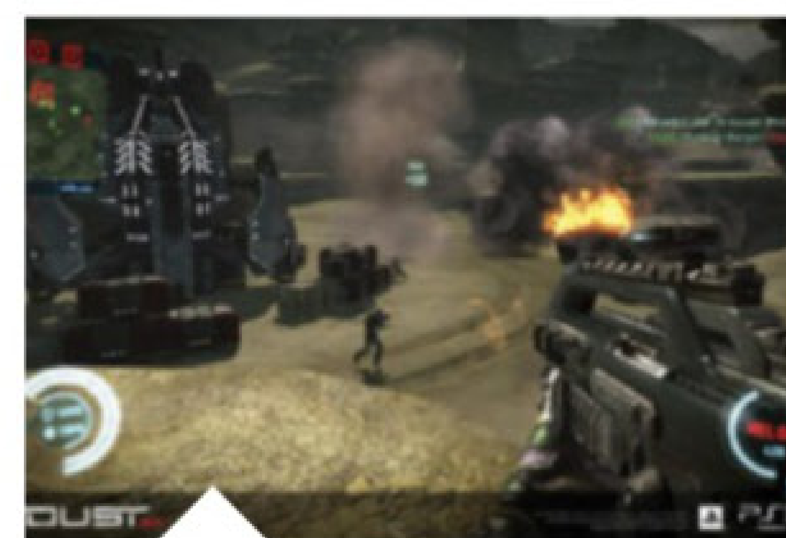
Taking gamers deeper than the standard grind of typical action MMOs, *TERA* has the option of letting the player control their character with either a keyboard/mouse combo or a pad. With 80+ environments and thousands of quests, all powered by Unreal 3, the game shifted to a freemium model in February 2013, and has no restrictions in place for free players, á la *WOW* or *Rift*.



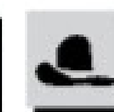
34 TRIBES ASCEND
PC, Hi-Rez Studios

Tribes Ascend introduced an interesting pricing structure a little way into its life – while the game is free to play, Hi-Rez offered a one-price package that would net you all the weapons in the game. For less than the price of a full retail game, grabbing all 54 weapons to play across 29 maps seems like great value for money.



35 DUST 514
PS3, CCP Shanghai

The PlayStation 3's first F2P FPS, *Dust 514* is an extension of the *Eve Online* universe that takes inspiration for its pricing model from *League Of Legends*. The developers of *Dust 514* are keen to point out that the title is a skill-based game, that it isn't pay-to-win and doesn't have a paywall, despite the option to purchase additional items and vehicles.



BEYOND SKYRIM

WILL THE ELDER SCROLLS ONLINE REVOLUTIONISE NEXT-GEN MMOS?

It's almost implicit when discussing any upstart fantasy MMO to compare it to the perennial dominant leader in an increasingly cluttered genre, *World Of Warcraft*. As perfunctory an observation as it is, the association is somewhat more pertinent in the case of *The Elder Scrolls Online*, given how unusual it is that few publishers have attempted to mine an MMO from an existing world-conquering IP. That's exactly how Blizzard started on its journey back in 2004, and now Bethesda is making similar strides with its *Elder Scrolls* brand. But what type of experience will *The Elder Scrolls Online* be? Is it a brand new *Elder Scrolls* game with a few concessions made so it satisfies the MMO criteria? Essentially *Skyrim* but with human interactions? A fresh experience tailored towards MMO convention, albeit it with the likes of Altmer and Khajit skins?

As it turns out, developer ZeniMax Online Studios pitches *The Elder Scrolls Online* as *Skyrim* with online players, almost to the point where the MMO element is disguised by the familiarity of the series' last single-player RPG. The combat system, the quests you embark on, the dialogue from NPCs, the geography of the world - this is *Elder Scrolls* through and through with the DNA of its solo adventures coursing through its veins. It's a new world and a new genre, but there's a pervasive sense of familiarity. "A lot of the influence behind why we made *The Elder Scrolls Online* was because you'd see your friends online playing *Oblivion* and *Skyrim* and you couldn't play with them," explains PvP designer Brian Wheeler. "So we should make an online version but keep it familiar. If you've played an *Elder Scrolls* game, our goal is to make this one feel familiar." »

"TAMRIEL DOESN'T LOOK QUITE AS DETAILED OR AS DENSE AS SKYRIM DOES ON A NUCLEAR-POWERED PC, BUT THAT'S THE ONLY CLUE YOU'RE PLAYING AN MMO"

» This is demonstrated within the opening hours, taking a similar introductory approach as *Skyrim*, *Oblivion* and *Morrowind* – you create a character and you're then thrown into a huge world with nothing more than your own curiosity and a map sprinkled with icons to guide you. NPCs are dotted around the world to interact with for idle chatter, while distant hilltops and mountains suggest a vast terrain to slowly explore and pick apart. Understandably, Tamriel – the vast continent *The Elder Scrolls* is set within – doesn't look quite as detailed or as dense as *Skyrim* does on a nuclear-powered PC, as concessions have obviously been made to allow for the massively-multiplayer side of the title to flourish. But that's the only obvious clue from the beginning that what you're playing is an MMO. Wheeler agrees, pointing towards design elements aimed at the console audience. "It plays like *Skyrim*, so it's going to be familiar to [console gamers]. Same controls, same world, same look and feel. Its going to be perceived more as a good RPG and a good *Elder Scrolls* game that you get to play with your buddies than a good MMO."

The strangest thing about *The Elder Scrolls Online* is how easily other players blend into the experience, to the point where you don't instinctively notice them. Given the character creation limits, new players end up looking like odd NPCs at worst, other players easily fit in with the world – the only giveaways from a distance are eccentric behaviour you'd only see from a human

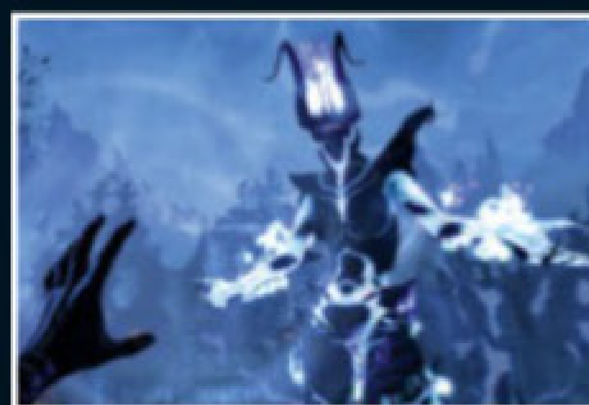


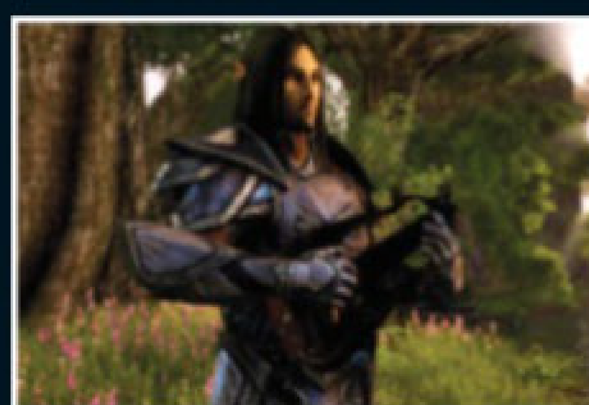
Dodging and blocking has become a more important part of combat, as the easiest way to kill enemies without fuss is to disable their attacks first.



LEVEL UP

When you level up, you invest points into either Health, Magicka or Stamina, which represent permanent boosts to that particular attribute. You can also unlock skills for your class that slot into your hotbar. You can switch classes by unlocking skills outside of your chosen tree too, but if you want to get on with the simple art of playing and slaying your foes you can employ a sort of automatic levelling up system, which leaves the game in charge of the maths behind the best path for you to take. It seems a bit pointless – after all, the choice when levelling up seems to be the main reward for playing – but it is another option to consider.





HOW TO PICK YOUR CLASS

One of the earliest decisions to make is what class and skill tree to follow. Templars have the options of Aedric Spear, Dawn's Wrath and Restoring Light. But how do the skill trees differ?

AEDRIC SPEAR

The most basic of the Templar classes, Aedric Spear is primarily a melee class that's backed up with basic ranged support.

ULTIMATE
RADIAL SWEEP
ACTIVE
PUNCTURING STRIKES
PIERCING JAVELIN
FOCUSED CHARGE
SUN SHIELD
SPEAR SHARDS
PASSIVE
PIERCING SPEAR

DAWN'S WRATH

Those opting for Dawn's Wrath get ranged fire attacks, making it a better class to use alongside a melee or 'tank' style brawler.

ULTIMATE
NOVA
ACTIVE
SUN FIRE
SOLAR FLARE
BACKLASH
ECLIPSE
BLINDING LIGHT
PASSIVE
ENDURING RAYS

RESTORING LIGHT

The healing class. Those who choose the Restoring Light path will struggle when it comes to damage output while excelling at support.

ULTIMATE
RITE OF PASSAGE
ACTIVE
RUSHED CEREMONY
HEALING RITUAL
RESTORING AURA
CLEANING RITUAL
RUNE FOCUS
PASSIVE
MENDING

There are lots of stunning environments in *The Elder Scrolls Online* that demand exploration, with the geography matching that of previous games.



player online, such as jumping up and down on the spot, or odd names like CucumberMash or HaloFan338. Outside of the PvP zones, your interactivity with them is limited to chatting and trading, or teaming up to take down monsters. That kind of spontaneity didn't occur too often in our brief hands-on, simply because players seemed to default to the one-player-versus-the-world mentality.

This lone-wolf mindset extends to quest design, with ZeniMax highlighting a small selection to **games™** that swing between classic MMO fetching and *Elder Scrolls* busywork. One such quest is that of the Frozen Man, where you're asked to venture into an ice cave to save a frozen companion. The cave seems to be guarded by a spirit that won't release the frozen victim until you've figured out its identity. This is presented in the form of gathering clues but, in gameplay terms, it's just finding the three key items inside the cave. This eventually led to an interesting mini-game of figuring out which of the various guises was the Frozen Man himself, something that wouldn't feel too out of place in previous *Elder Scrolls* titles.

Certainly there's a sense that, given the overwhelming success of *Skyrim*, ZeniMax sought to capitalise on what worked and not stray too far off the beaten path. "Sure, we looked at *Skyrim* and took some cues from it, *Oblivion* as well," admits Wheeler, before discussing other elements that do and don't return, and that have been given an MMO twist. "Some things we have unfortunately not been able to do, like dragons – they didn't exist at that point in the timeline. But we took a lot from *Skyrim*, especially regarding the elder scrolls, if I recall that was the first game where you could actually obtain an elder scroll. We've used that so, in PVP, a goal is to take an elder scroll from your enemy. The things we are allowed to do with the world and the IP are always growing."

There's an elephant in the room, though, in the form of combat. In that regard *The Elder Scrolls Online* unavoidably takes its cues from genre contemporaries. You level up and unlock active or passive skills, with the active skills being placed onto a hotbar. You can use up to five, with a cool-down ability limiting how often you use them. Among the challenges of developing engaging combat mechanics, Wheeler cites the design of the keeps as a particular obstacle the team had to overcome when approaching combat: "Making sure [they] worked – the space and how big they are. Keeps are large so there can be lots of movement. They aren't vertical; they stay pretty flat to make sure that it's not a layered fight. We left it open, but you blow up parts of the walls and keeps to get inside."

Nothing new for MMO fans, but this changes things for *Elder Scrolls* veterans. There's a litany of modifications, for example, archers have unlimited arrows that all fire standard shots, but to fire flaming or poison arrows, you need to unlock the ability and equip it on your hotbar. Understandably, this has a dramatic effect on the dynamics of combat, and there are further changes that embrace MMO conventions within the *Elder Scrolls* framework.





● Finding other players in *The Elder Scrolls Online* is an unusual experience, as you don't really need them to play and they tend to fit in the world so well.







The challenge for translating the experience to console is incorporating the various active skills on a pad alongside the usual *Elder Scrolls* controls. It's something ZeniMax Online is still working out. "The mouse control movement translates really well to the thumbsticks," says Wheeler. "When it comes to the activation of skills, we are debating whether it's face buttons or something else, but there are people back at the studio who have used third-party programs and mapped the PC version to a pad and played it. We are still nailing down the control scheme but it plays just fine. The regular *Oblivion*-style combat of left block, right attack is what we are looking at for a starting point but there's a lot of tweaking still to go."

One area of *The Elder Scrolls Online* that is yet to be revealed in any significant depth is one that could potentially define its success – PvP. Having player versus player functionality in the *Elder Scrolls* series has been something of a wishlist feature for fans for many years. But it wasn't quite as simple as that. "A lot of when we were first going through the discussions of which zones would be PvP," Wheeler tells us. "We knew Cyrodiil would be part of it because, if you look at the timeline, this period says 'civil war', that's all it says. So we were like; okay, Imperial City, let's get started from there. It kind of grew out of that. Imperial City was too small and we wanted larger fights so we pulled out into Cyrodiil itself while making sure what we were doing was okay with Bethesda. And they said 'Sure, it's 700 years before *Oblivion* so we have some freedom'. So the topography is all the same – same terrain. We took landmarks and did different things with them. Various broken ruins in *Oblivion* are full castles in our game. It was fun to look at the map and work out how to take *Oblivion* and work it into a PvP game."

Far from a slave to two masters, *The Elder Scrolls Online* seamlessly unites the best elements of two neighbouring worlds. Indeed, Zenimax's approach is indicative of a fresh perspective towards the genre, placing an emphasis on role-playing, while wrapping multiplayer sensitively around its features. If the gamble pays off, it could finally see the genre flourish outside of the PC market. "That would be awesome if we did lead the way, and very humbling at the same time," enthuses Wheeler. "To be one of the guys that helped make an *Elder Scrolls* game that spearheaded MMOs to become popular on console. That would be awesome."

The Elder Scrolls Online will be released on PC, PS4 and Xbox One Q1 2014.



ELDER SCROLLS ONLINE – WHEN IS IT SET?

The official blurb for The Elder Scrolls Online is that it's set 'before Morrowind and Oblivion', which doesn't help a great deal if you're not familiar with the lore. This should help explain the context…

THE DAWN ERA

■ The birth of time. This period of pre-history is prior to the advent of mortals on Tamriel, and knowledge of this time is known only through mythological and religious teachings.

MERETHIC ERA

■ This is when the Aedra created the realms of Mundus and Aetherius and also when the Daedra created the spheres of Oblivion. Again, not much from this era is well-documented within the world of *The Elder Scrolls*.

THE FIRST ERA

■ This is when the lore starts to become dense with detail and events, as the *Elder Scrolls* lore becomes fleshed out around this point. The key events are the creation of the First Empire and Second Empire, the latter of which saw Reman Cyrodiil ruling over all.

"FAR FROM A SLAVE TO TWO MASTERS, THE ELDER SCROLLS ONLINE SEAMLESSLY UNITES THE BEST ELEMENTS OF TWO NEIGHBOURING WORLDS"

THE SECOND ERA

■ This is when *The Elder Scrolls Online* is set. The Cyrodiilic Empire rules and creates organisations such as the Fighters Guild and Mages Guild. War tears Tamriel apart when the last leader, Savirien-Chorak, is assassinated without an heir to the throne. The era ends when Talos, known as Tiber Septim, conquers all of Tamriel.

THE THIRD ERA

■ This is the era of the Empire of Tamriel, ruled over by the Septim Dynasty. This is also the era that *Elder Scrolls* fans will be familiar with, as *The Elder Scrolls: Arena*, *Daggerfall*, *Morrowind* and *Oblivion* all took place during this era.

THE FOURTH ERA

■ This era begins when the Septim Dynasty falls, marked by the death of Martin Septim. *Skyrim* is set during this era. Also – dragons! The official reason for them not being in *The Elder Scrolls Online* is that they didn't exist in the Second Era.

CAGE AGAINST

One of the industry's most polarising dignitaries, David Cage is a purveyor of progressive storytelling within a creative medium lost in template sequels. With the recent release of Beyond: Two Souls, Cage writes for games™, offering an intimate insight into the romance, anxiety and reward of his process...



Beyond's story is a little bit out there at times, but is balanced out by strong, realistic human moments with Page's Jodie character.








THE MACHINE

For me, each project is made of four nightmares. The first one is the writing. The anxiety of the blank page, the hope to find something exciting enough to justify dedicating three years of my life, something that will still be exciting three years from now. The second nightmare is the shooting. A year on set every day, capturing thousands of pieces of a giant puzzle, while praying that no piece will be missing, scheduling every minute of twelve months for 156 actors; working on stunts one day and then on an emotional scene the next. The third nightmare is about assembling all the pieces together, trying to give them sense, hoping that the magic will happen one more time. The fourth nightmare is the only one you have no control over. It is the moment »




Hopefully *Beyond* marks the first of many occasions where big name actors commit to the weighty role of a videogame lead.

» you send your work to journalists around the world and wait to hear what they think, if they will give your game a chance or cast it into videogames void, where the hopes of so many developers lie. Then comes the time for gamers themselves to play the game, the most important moment; the charts, the sales figures, the forums full of groups of people who share their passion or, fair or unfair, make jokes about anything they think you could have done better.

This fourth nightmare is by far the worst for me. When you are plunged into action, working night and day, you maintain control. When the game leaves the studio, it is the end. Every minute you lost over three years, every wrong choice you made, every hope, every wish. Your heart and soul leave the studio forever on a disc. You will be judged for what you have achieved, and you will have to live with the sentence, good or bad, until your next game is released. You will become a hero or a pariah, a messiah or an outlaw. For better or worse, you will become 'The guy who did this game'.

Then why do I still make videogames if it is such a series of painful moments? The answer is found in all the other unique moments that you experience while creating them. First and foremost, it is an incredible journey with a team of talented people, working like hell to create something unique together. First, there are only hopes, some reasonable doubts, but still this momentum, this desire to make something we will all be proud of. Then there are the first successes, the first scene written, the first polygon displayed, the first victory against all odds, against the curse of projects that will never see the light of day… but also the moments of doubt, fear, panic, the moments where you think you will never make it.

Then there is this unique opportunity to meet some amazing people, living legends like David Bowie, incredibly nice and talented composers like Normand Corbeil, Hans Zimmer or Lorne Balfe, fascinating actors like Willem Dafoe or Ellen Page. There are all these nights at the office, wondering what we are doing here instead of being with our families, eating junk food and swearing on the Bible that this is the last time we crunch on a project.

And then there is the magic moment when you discover for the first time that idea from long ago, that started as few words on a blank page, come to life. You see the people around you forget how tired they are and when the last time they saw their families was. You feel relieved, like the captain who managed to get the boat safely to shore after a terrible storm at sea. You feel you have grown up a little bit, you are a slightly different person, and you feel you managed to do something with your »

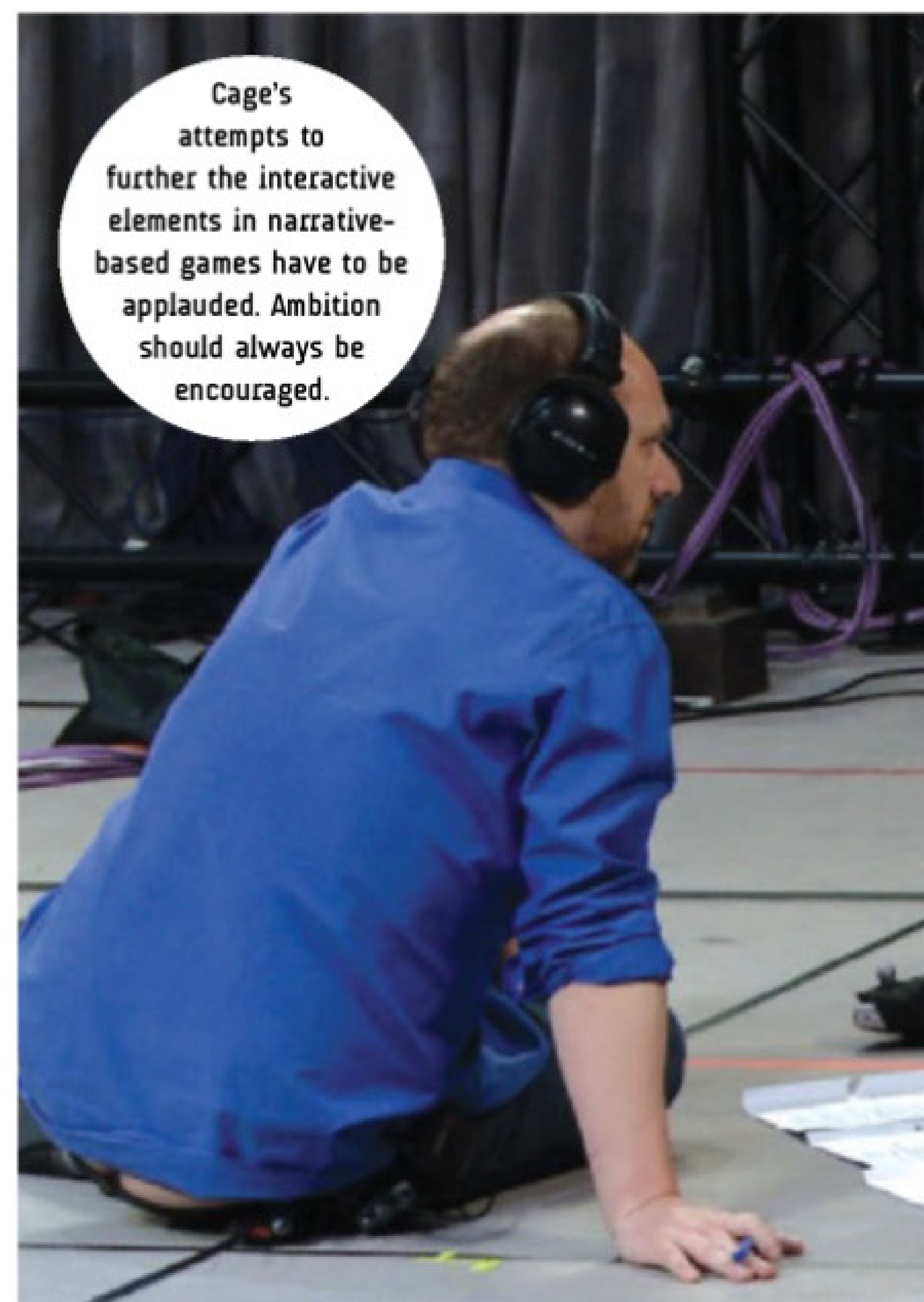




OMIKRON: THE NOMAD SOUL

YEAR: 1999

■ Released on PC and Dreamcast after being scrapped for both PSone and PS2, *Omikron: The Nomad Soul* is the most ambitious entry in David Cage's revered portfolio. Its high-concept narrative involves the playing as yourself with your soul transferred into one of the characters inhabiting the world. It's refreshingly meta, with NPCs acknowledging their own transient virtual existence, Cage's debut demonstrating his inclination towards twisting convention – something that would become a throughline across all his work. Also, David Bowie.



Cage's attempts to further the interactive elements in narrative-based games have to be applauded. Ambition should always be encouraged.

"I KNOW THAT INTERACTIVITY IS FINALLY GOING TO BECOME MATURE AT SOME POINT"



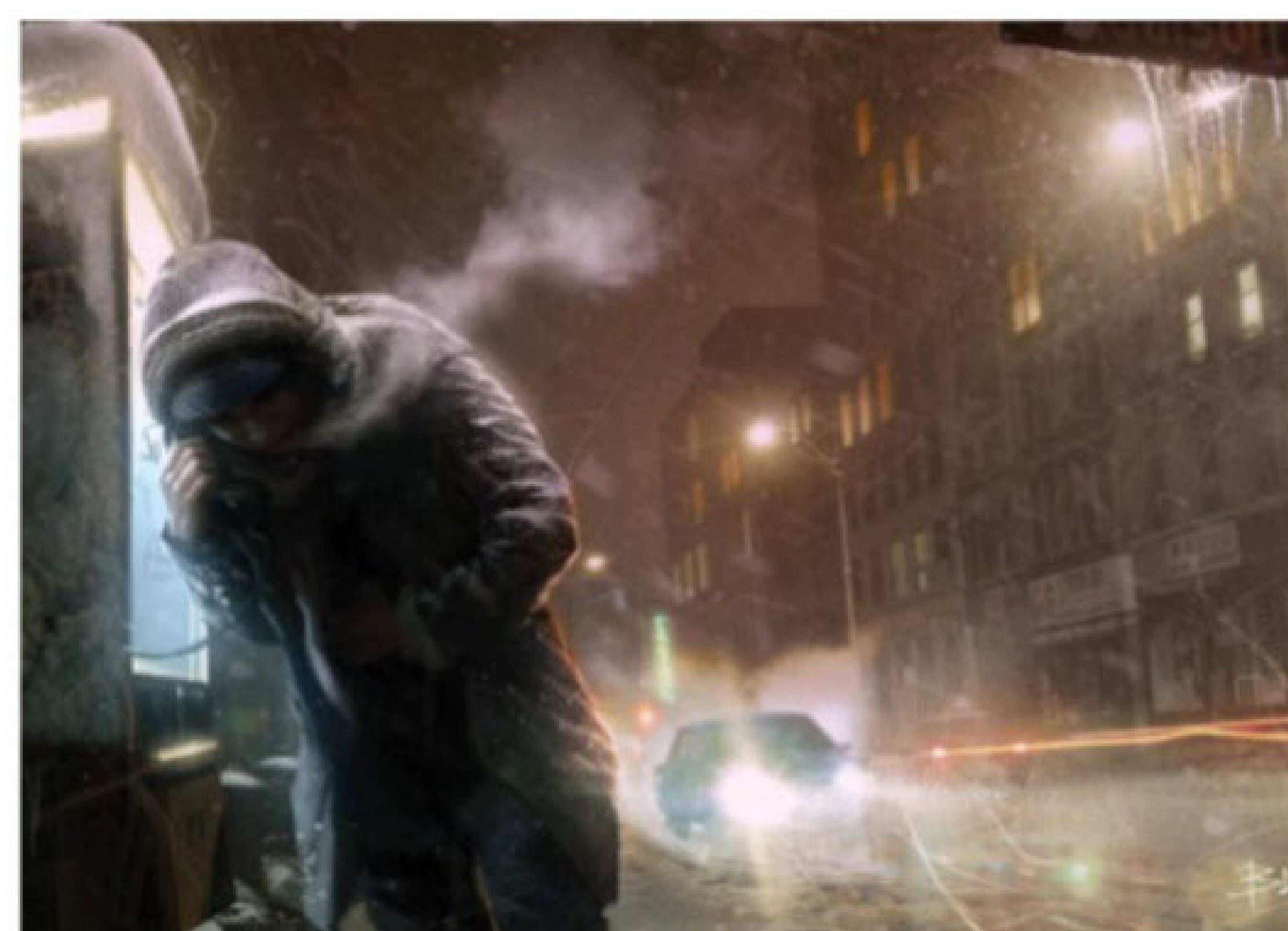




FAHRENHEIT

YEAR: 2005

■ Cage's follow-up to *Omikron: The Nomad Soul* appears a more straightforward proposition but in truth contains no fewer leftfield concepts than his debut. Rampaging anthropoids, maleficent robots and an old woman who is the internet are among a few of the barmy ideas rattling around within *Fahrenheit*'s narrative. It's notable that the opening pitches *Fahrenheit* as a completely different experience; Cage enabling players to control opposing characters and utilising split-screen to unnerving brilliance. The rest of it is a jumble of ideas that often hint at something far greater, but it's impossible not to admire the esoteric nature and unrestrained spirit at its heart.



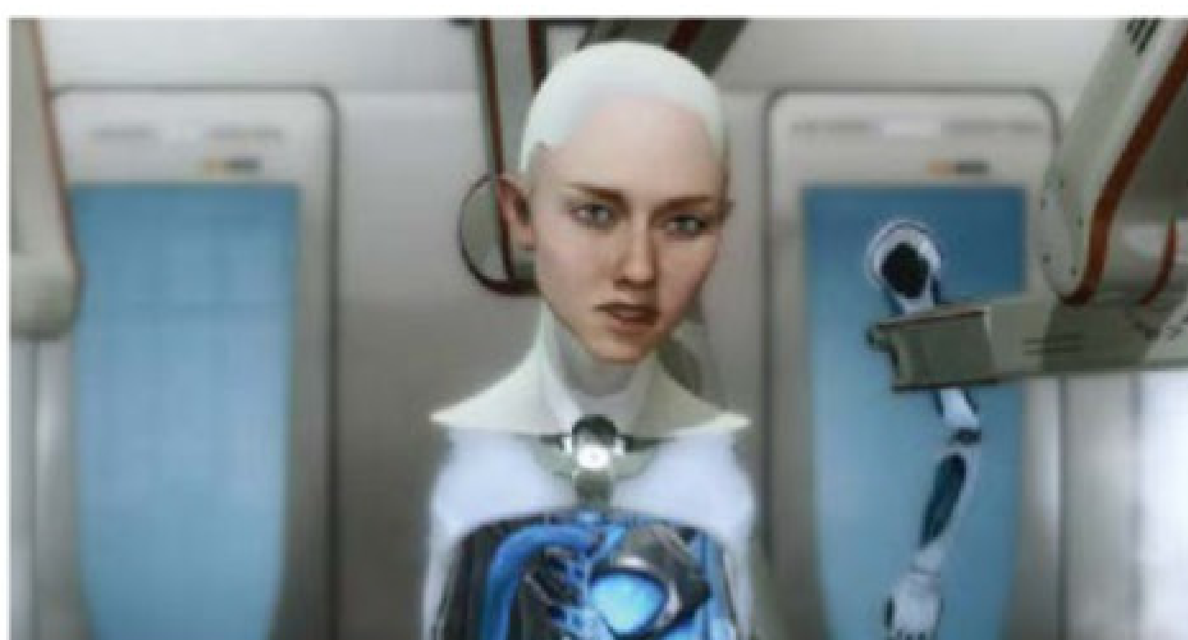


HEAVY RAIN

YEAR: 2010

■ A straight-up murder mystery heavily influenced by the cinematic works of David Fincher, *Heavy Rain* is undoubtedly a more confident experience. While the plot takes itself along a more conventional and commercial route, where Cage continues to subvert expectations is through its unusual gameplay mechanics – a hybrid point-and-click-cum-third-person-action-game. It finally enabled Cage's writing – in all it's nuances and, well, *quirks* – to shine on a big budget platform, cementing the developer's reputation as one of the most interesting creatives working within the medium.

“I BELIEVE THAT GAMES CAN CHANGE THE WORLD; THAT THEY CAN BECOME THIS MEANINGFUL OUTLET THAT CAN TALK DIRECTLY TO THE SOUL OF THE PLAYER”



KARA

YEAR: 2012

■ Prior to the development of *Heavy Rain*, Cage created a short tech demo titled *The Casting*, which showcased the performance capabilities of the nascent PS3. In 2012 Cage unveiled *Kara*, another demonstration this time highlighting Quantic Dream's newest engine. With a focus on performance, it signals a huge leap in how a virtual avatar can perform, while offering a mere glimpse at how the enhanced technology can further fuel Cage's desire to explore complex themes through his games.



Beyond's motion-capture technology is a big leap over the sometimes stilted expressions of the characters in Quantic Dream's *Heavy Rain*.


Page's commitment to the role could represent a massive sea change for the use of Hollywood talent in mainstream videogames.



THE DARK SORCERER

YEAR: 2013

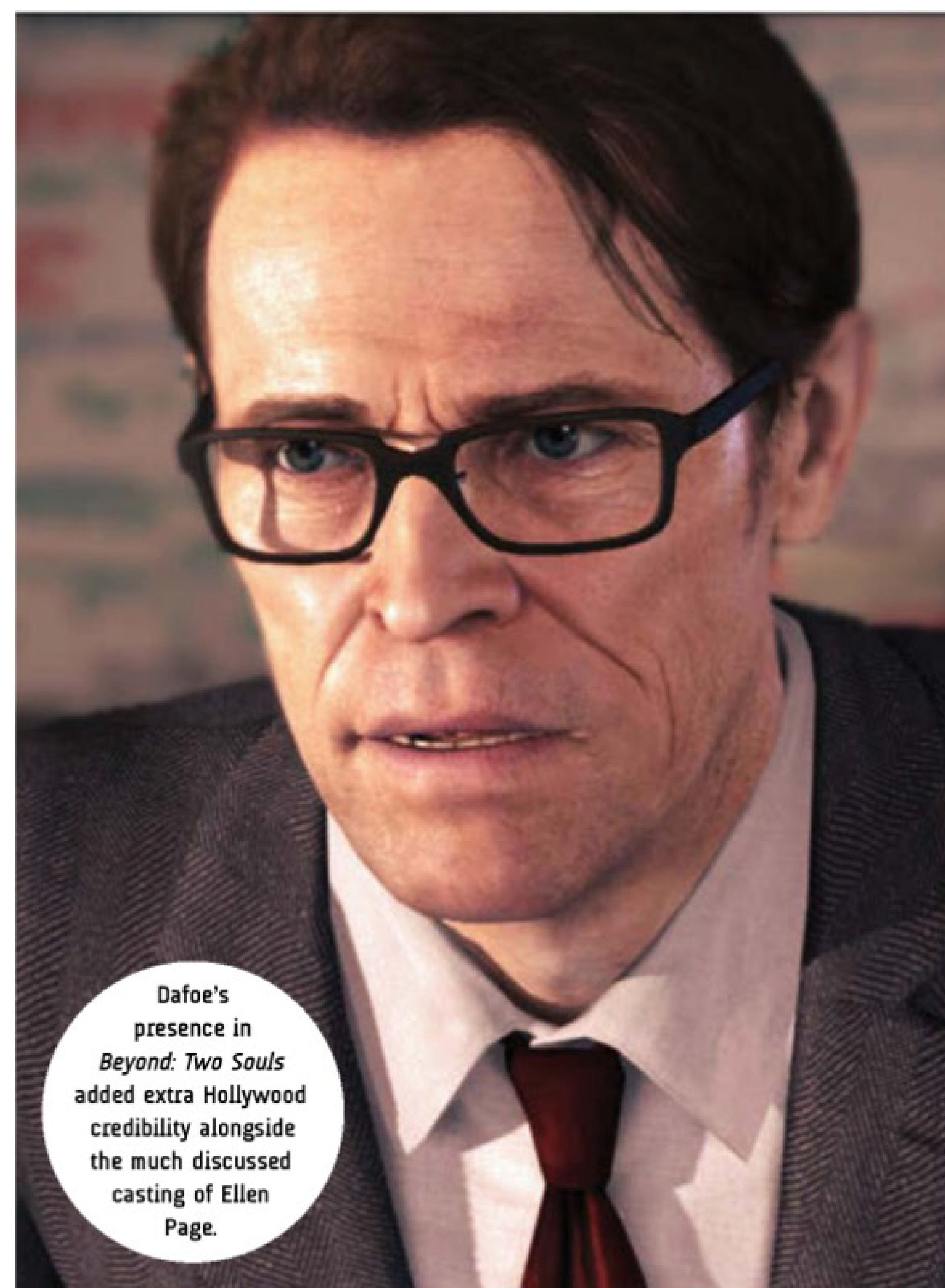
■ Like other tech demos, *The Dark Sorcerer* was produced to specifically showcase the potential in new technology. In this case for the PS4, the French studio produced an amusing and visually breathtaking sequence that matches photorealistic facial animation with just about every type of particle effect you can imagine. While there are no plans to adapt the short into a full game, it'd be interesting to see Cage adopt a similarly light-hearted tone in the future.



BEYOND: TWO SOULS

YEAR: 2013

■ The latest game from Quantic Dream, it's a testament to both Cage's evolution and a storyteller and the unforeseen success of *Heavy Rain* that he's courted Hollywood starlet Ellen Page and actor Willem Dafoe to star in *Beyond: Two Souls*. An intricately woven tale that tracks Page's Jodie through various stages in her life, Cage's taste for cinematic comes to the fore.


Dafoe's presence in *Beyond: Two Souls* added extra Hollywood credibility alongside the much discussed casting of Ellen Page.

» life. Even if it is insignificant for most people out there, you have made something you are proud of. Then there is the wait, the silence before the verdict, the moment where you think of all the things you should have done differently. Three years of your life reduced to a score. It can feel unfair, you always feel hurt, and you only read the bad comments until you decide not to read anything any more.

And then there are the fans, the nice emails they send you. The letters that ask you where Jayden's cut comes from, or begging you to make a game with Kara; people defending your vision on forums as if it was their own, unknown people coming to me when I am in a restaurant to tell me they loved *Heavy Rain*, fans who want pictures and autographs.

It is not about fame or ego, it is about sharing a passion with people, feeling their support, thanking *them* for letting me do this job for sixteen years now.

I make videogames for all these reasons, the good and the bad, the pleasant and unpleasant. I am truly fascinated by this medium because I believe we are doing something important here. I know that interactivity is finally going to become mature at some point, and it is going to be the most incredible medium ever created, capable of evoking important things in a very unique way. Eventually, it will become an art.

Most of all, I make games because I enjoy it more than anything. They gave me the opportunity to explore this new form of expression and to share my feelings and passion with millions of people across the planet. I believe that games can change the world; that they can become this meaningful outlet that can talk directly to the soul of the player. Game after game, I try to contribute to this vision and this desire is stronger than all the challenges in the world. 



Beyond: Two Souls is released 11 October and is reviewed on page 88.

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Grand Theft Auto V

Rockstar's open world opus is finally upon us



THE AVERAGE

Three of the numbers in a ten-point scale are of greater importance than the others: five, seven, and of course, ten. Some publications would fool you into believing that a 7/10 game is average, but that just doesn't make sense to us. **games™** reviews videogames on their entertainment value, and so any title that simply performs to an adequate standard will receive a 5/10. Simple. The elusive ten is reserved for games of incredible, irrefutable quality, but please be aware that a score of ten in no way professes to mean perfection. Perfection is an unattainable goal, and on a ten-point scale nothing should be unattainable. Again, simple. Our reviews are not a checklist of technical features with points knocked off for flaws, neither are they a PR-pressured fluff-fest – we'd never let that happen, and besides you'd smell it a mile off. And finally, the reviews you find within these pages are most certainly not statements of fact, they are the opinions of schooled, knowledgeable videogame journalists, designed to enlighten, inform, and engage. The gospel according to **games™**.













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THIS WORLD HAS EVERYTHING A SEASONED GTA FAN WILL BE LOOKING FOR AFTER THE MORE RESERVED SCALE OF GTA IV

FLYING HIGH

It's still the best part of playing *GTA* – and also the most complicated in its mechanics. Like all of the character skills, flying becomes easier if you do it more and more, and by the game's climax, you will be trying to hover under every single bridge in the game, much as you could in Liberty City. The difference is, with a city this size, it will take much longer than five minutes to comb the entire map, and when the engine splutters and dies as you try to cross a mountain range, there's a certain amount of drama in bringing the aircraft to a stop. No doubt intentionally, your first flight takes place during dusk over one of the quieter landscapes in the game, a brisk change of pace from the heist mission that precedes it. While it all may be open from the start, these deliberate touches frame the world in an interesting fashion.





AMERICAN HUSTLE

Grand Theft Auto V

DETAILS

FORMAT: Xbox 360
OTHER FORMATS: PS3
ORIGIN: Scotland
PUBLISHER: Rockstar Games
DEVELOPER: Rockstar North
PRICE: £49.99
RELEASE: Out now
PLAYERS: 1-16
ONLINE REVIEWED: No

Left: Los Angeles really isn't as nice a city in real life as New York, hence Los Santos isn't as initially striking. But the beauty comes in details; a boring chunk of LA is cut out, connecting Downtown to Santa Monica.

***Grand Theft Auto V* is, as expected, a best-of compilation of everything that Rockstar has achieved to date in open world game design.** With the dynamic nature of *Red Dead Redemption*, *Max Payne 3*'s sharp combat, the feeling of scale from *San Andreas* and the relentless detail of *Grand Theft Auto IV*'s Liberty City, it's a generous package wrapped around the most impressive of sandbox environments.

The biggest sea change for *GTA V* is of course its three interchangeable main characters, Michael, Franklin and Trevor, all of whom are a little lighter to be in the company of than *GTA IV*'s frequently tortured Niko Bellic. While Michael is the most interesting of the group, essentially a retired Tommy Vercetti in witness protection who even dwells relentlessly on the Eighties while struggling to bond with his family, Franklin is a sympathetic-if-bland wannabe master criminal who realises he has to make his opportunities in life. Trevor, on the other hand, is an all-consuming loose cannon, representing that space of *GTA* characters that simply fly off the handle and perform appalling acts for chuckles.

The best thing about the story is that it doesn't take itself nearly as seriously as *GTA IV* – that approach certainly had a place and marked an interesting tonal departure for the Rockstar of five years ago, yet this lighter storyline puts it much more in the ballpark of *Vice City*; some pathos, but otherwise played for comedy. Controlling the three of them, on the other hand, is a new experience, and at any moment the player finds themselves wandering around the open world with nothing to do, they can jump into the shoes of the others to see what they're up to in about ten seconds or under, depending how far away they are.

Some course-correction has been done with regards to the pacing – no longer do we have to wait for different parts of the world to open up, it's entirely open from the start, with the slightly later introduction of Trevor also providing quick access to aircraft. To balance that out, it always feels like it takes slightly longer to get anywhere in the context of the storyline when you're playing as three characters at once, and while one of the intentions of having three characters may have been to minimise downtime, there are still plenty of quiet moments in which to absorb the open world.

To make that high concept even sweeter, driving, shooting and flying mechanics have all received a significant overhaul. The cover-based shooting feels like it uses *Max Payne 3* as its foundation, while driving is more responsive and less rigid than it was in *GTA IV*, meaning that it's not quite as easy to fall foul during a chase as it used to be. Flying is still a bit unwieldy at first, even playing as Trevor, but easy enough to learn – and naturally, getting airborne across these immense landscapes is still a breathtaking highlight as it always has been in *GTA*.

MISSING LINK

WHAT WE WOULD CHANGE

RANDOM PEOPLE: Most of the strangers come attached to boring missions that could've been stricken from the game in many cases, instead replaced with just a well-written cutscene.

It's gratifying, then, with these basic revamps in mind, that the backdrop to any titting about in *Grand Theft Auto V* just happens to be the most creatively and technically accomplished open world ever created. Los Santos – but it really is just a next-gen San Andreas, minus San Fierro and Las Venturos – absolutely offers the sense of place that the final *GTA* on PS2 accomplished but against a far grander backdrop, that feeling that the surrounding world changes as Michael or Franklin move outside of the city, going from urban decay to beautiful countryside, all realised with the kind of remarkable detail that we haven't seen anywhere else during this generation.

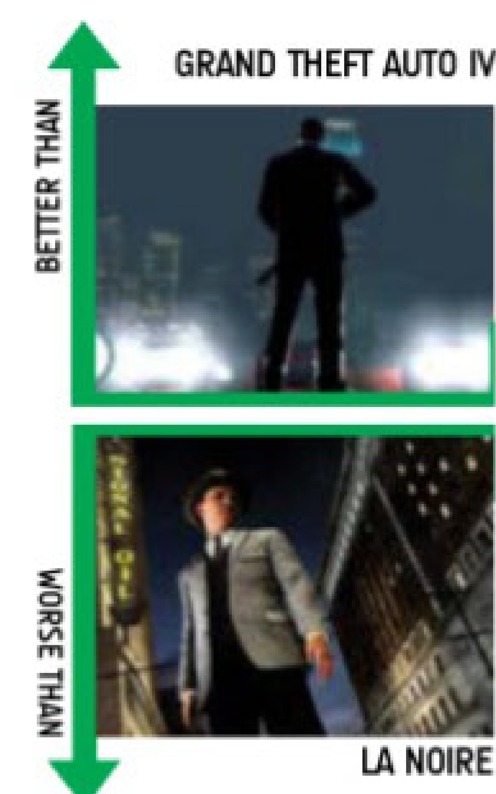
Los Santos itself is to Los Angeles what Liberty City is to New York, a truncated replica that perfectly captures the spirit of what that American city represents. In this case, it's vanity, showbiz and perverse wealth existing alongside overwhelming poverty. Los Santos captures the decaying glory of the city with gusto, to the point where we found ourselves driving under a bridge we had to walk under to get to



Above: Franklin's storyline takes you into parts of Los Santos that will feel familiar if you played even a little bit of *San Andreas*. We won't give it away…



Left: NPCs actually swim for their life when you raid boats at sea. As you would, we suppose.



BETTER THAN: GRAND THEFT AUTO IV
WORSE THAN: LA NOIRE

E3 earlier this year, or walking past the hotel where we interviewed Peter Molyneux (under construction).

Everything is where it's supposed to be, in a condensed but eerily accurate way – even if your perception of Los Angeles is formed from movies and TV, you'll see something you recognise, like the beautiful LAPD building from *LA Confidential* (and indeed, *LA Noire*), or the famous Hollywood theatre where Jon Favreau got blown up in *Iron Man 3*. It's as much informed by popular culture as it is reality, such is Rockstar's approach to building cities in *GTA*, and a kind of nauseous celebrity culture manifests itself very well in the story, radio stations and even just NPC dialogue.

Then, on the other side of the world in dry mountainous landscapes that wouldn't look out of place in *Fallout*, another environment entirely transforms the *GTA* experience. The world is gigantic, and while Los Santos is certainly the most densely detailed part of it, the remote landscapes where you initially pick the game up with Trevor is the other crucial half of *GTA V*'s world. Driving from the sticks to the Los Santos is an immensely pleasurable journey that rivals John Marston's sojourn into Mexico, and no matter how many times you make that trip, no matter how you get there or at what time of day you're travelling, it's quite unlike anything else. This world has everything a seasoned *GTA* fan will be looking for after the more reserved scale of *GTA IV* – and existing consoles are able to handle it just fine, minus the occasional pop up.

Having three characters occupying this immense world isn't as a big a difference overall as we thought it might be. It's more meaningful in missions, where you can perform multiple roles at once, sometimes at the behest of the game, and other times at your own discretion. Indeed, missions involving multiple characters are usually the best, and the heists, which require a certain amount of preparation and allow players the freedom to plan how things will go down, are among the highlights of a very strong set of story levels that harbour greater ambition than we've seen in the series to date.

More notable, actually, is the way missions take advantage of the sandbox – stealth and action-based approaches are both on the cards in a lot of scenarios, and the missions of this nature are impressively open-ended in the way the player can kill their way to the finish line. The kind of scenarios we had to wait until the final third for in previous *GTA* instalments, those involving aircraft, insane firearms and continuous chaos, are prevalent throughout *Grand Theft Auto V*.

Yet at the risk of peaking early, *Grand Theft Auto V* changes pace often and finds compelling ways to draw us into the different parts of the world. The result of this structure is a heightened sense of place, three protagonists offering different snapshots of life in Los Santos through their interactions with other characters. It doesn't feel particularly new, but the character switching has a novelty than never really wears off, while the progression system attached to skills gives adequate incentive to play as all three.

For us, it was Michael we gravitated towards the most and spent the majority of time with, his interactions with his ungrateful family being an early highlight. Indeed, if we wanted to pinpoint the greatness of *GTA V*'s systems and the dynamic stories that it permits, an example is when we returned home to Michael's plush home one day and looked in every room for his family members: his witless and overconfident gamer son Jimmy, his wayward daughter Tracey and his mistreated wife Amanda. Every interaction with each of them usually yields some funny moments, but since none of them were home, we instead got high on Jimmy's bong, staggered back into Michael's bedroom and had him try on every suit in his wardrobe before giving up and passing out on the bed. It's a small instance that reminded us that we both care about the characters and had the agency to express ourselves within the world, and whether on a micro or macro level, *GTA V* allowed us to do almost anything we'd want to.

WORLDWIDE

TAKING GAMING ONLINE

GTA ONLINE: *GTA*'s online component hasn't been taken into account with this review because it simply wasn't available – next month we'll be taking an in-depth look at *GTA*'s MMO-inspired online content.

FAQs

Q. IS THE SCRIPTED STORY CREDIBLE?
It's extremely entertaining, though not a masterpiece in narrative.

Q. IS IT CONTROVERSIAL?
It is. We had to do more than a couple of things we weren't massively comfortable with.

Q. BETTER THAN RED DEAD?
Bigger. But it's a tie for sheer wonder at the world provided.



Right: Police encounters are a little softer than they were in *GTA*, thanks to a health bar that recharges up to half and cops that are easier to evade.





Right: Heists offer the most scope for customisation, and there are some surprises to add to proceedings later on.

Below: Michael is by far the most compelling of the three protagonists, though the characterisation is still one-dimensional for the most part. *GTA*'s real texture comes in existing within the world.



TIMELINE HIGHLIGHTS

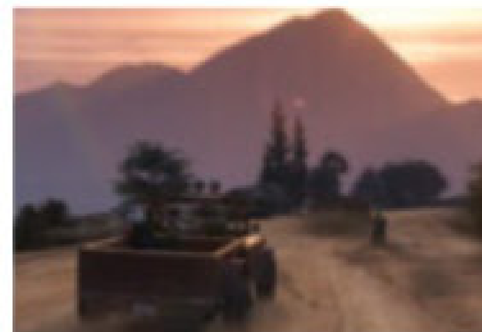
THE BEST BITS IN THE GAME AND WHEN YOU CAN EXPECT TO SEE THEM

35 MINS



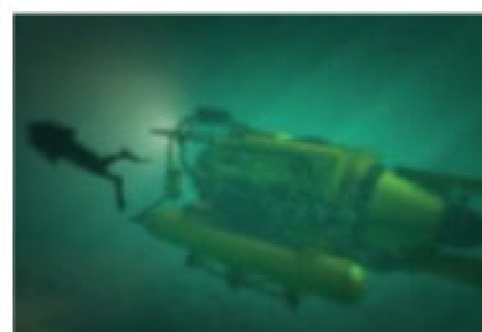
Reassuring: it's a lot easier to drive a car than it was in *Grand Theft Auto IV*. The city impresses on a number of levels straight away, with fast cars easy to access from the very start of the game.

12 HOURS



We've found our way out of the city and the sun sets as we collide a car with a nearby group of pedestrians and drive off to Britney Spears' *Gimme More*. The contrast is somehow pleasing.

7 DAYS



Unsurprisingly, there are still loads of things to do and big patches of the land still to be explored. You'll also begin combing the ocean floor just for fun. The magnitude of this world is unbelievable.



THE TIME IN BETWEEN

The story will naturally show you what the world has to offer in a fairly organic fashion. However, when we reflect on our personal *GTA V* experiences, we instead think of the moments where we decided to do a circle of the entire map from early evening to late morning the next day. While the story offers necessary structure, don't be afraid to just follow your whims and see where it takes you – the training wheels are always off in Los Santos, which is the best decision Rockstar could've made in allowing players to uncover the open world if they're too impatient to follow the story. That seems to be the new trend for sandbox titles these days – maybe today's audience isn't into the idea of deferred gratification in game design.



EVEN IF YOUR PERCEPTION OF LOS ANGELES IS FORMED FROM MOVIES AND TV, YOU'LL SEE SOMETHING YOU RECOGNISE

The smaller details and activities of the world are best left as surprises to be found – stranger missions return in an increased capacity, some of which are quite rote in mission design by *GTA V*'s overall standards, but nonetheless embellish the world through its different viewpoints. The radio stations clearly telegraph the post-recession context of the setting – which perhaps feels a couple of years out of date in channelling the direct outrage of ordinary people towards the banking top brass that ruined millions of lives – and it's helped by Rockstar's funniest scriptwriting since *GTA III*'s Chatterbox. Some of this content can be hit and miss, but there's something subtly pleasing about Lazlow and a couple of his radio collaborators being among the few surviving elements of 2001 *GTA* to present day. Hardcore fans who remember Lazlow being educated in martial arts combined with eating vegetables are bound to appreciate these touches.



Radio stations have a remarkable level of variety, although enjoyment of them is bound to depend on your musical tastes, even if, say, your music involves vaguely embarrassing late Nineties/Noughties pop. Amazingly, some stations are regional, too – drive over the hills out of Los Santos and you'll lose the signal of one and pick up another. Television returns in an even more elaborate, lightly satirical fashion. *GTA V* is so giving, and with so many ancillary activities available outside of the main story, you will quite seriously invest *Skyrim* levels of time in it.

Dan Houser compared the making of Rockstar's epic to the troubled production of Francis Ford Coppola's *Apocalypse Now*, and in some ways the same result has been met: a product that represents the peak of the blockbuster triple-A form, that realises grand ambition without visible compromise. It's likely you're reading this review having already bought *GTA V* or with the intention to do so – indeed, its release is a deserved cultural event, and while this sequel may not be remembered for showing us anything strictly new, this represents the pinnacle of Rockstar's design ingenuity across every single discipline, a game that absolutely everyone will feel richer for playing.

VERDICT 10/10

MASTERFUL OPEN WORLD DESIGN FROM THE PIONEERS OF THE GENRE

FROM PAGE TO SCREEN

Beyond: Two Souls

Sony's late-generation resurgence has been quite the thing to behold; an ageing fighter rekindling the fires of old under new tutelage. The heady one-two combo of a world class exclusive in *The Last Of Us* and the almighty PlayStation Plus has seen the PS3 win over a vast swathe of gamers, and now we have the finishing uppercut – David Cage's wildly ambitious *Beyond: Two Souls.* A fitting send-off for a machine defined by its oddness as much as its exuberance.

This spiritual (in every sense of the word) sequel to *Heavy Rain* is a real one-off; a game of extraordinary lavishness in unusual areas – like the zenith of a path the rest of gaming gave up on a long time ago. You play as Jodie, a 'gifted' female portrayed by *Juno*'s Ellen Page, at various stages of her life, and the game explores her relationship with a ghostly partner from whom she cannot escape, Aiden.

That aforementioned lavishness is almost exclusively spent on spellbinding facial and motions capture technology that manages to bring Page and the surrounding cast to life on your screen. Without question, this is one of the most impressive looking games to appear anywhere, and it takes only a few seconds to buy Jodie as a real person, being played by Page as she would in a film. It's not photorealistic, but it's very, very close at times.

Page is joined by Hollywood stalwart Willem Dafoe, who plays Nathan Dawkins, a kindly scientist-cum-father figure who helps Jodie understand her unusual predicament. By using a non-linear narrative, Cage invites players into stages of Jodie's adolescence, childhood and early adult life in a series of interactive scenes, and weaves a complicated and personal story about death, the afterlife and the pains of growing up 'different'.

It's a very unusual game to criticise, as its gameplay systems are both limited and now, post-*Heavy Rain* (and *The Walking Dead*), quite familiar. Suffice to say, it works as well as it did previously, with basic QTEs doing an admirable job in conveying the emotion, excitement and threat of the story. Basic interactions remain the same as *Heavy Rain*'s (even down to the font), but action scenes now incorporate a stylish slow-mo which asks the player to mimic Jodie's direction of movement in order to complete. A more elegant solution than *Heavy Rain*'s constant button prompts.

By unifying its controls and interactions, *Beyond: Two Souls* asks players to immerse themselves in its story. A few years ago, questions like 'But is this a game?' would sound out across the internet and review spreads, but after a year or two where *Gone Home*, *Dear Esther*, *To The Moon* and, of course, *The Walking Dead* have all pushed to the gaming forefront and demanded to be taken seriously, *Beyond: Two Souls*' relative lack of 'gameplay' doesn't really feel like much of a talking point.

Far more interesting is to talk about the game's successes. By creating technology that truly transports its actors into the game, Quantic Dream allows its cast to express itself. And in Ellen Page's Jodie, we have a truly breathtaking performance. Page is a mercurial talent, throwing herself into the role as much as she has in any of her film parts, and gives one of the truly great videogame acting showcases.

Given that Jodie's character is one we've seen before in many films – a troubled child with a gift, haunted by spirits, struggling with growing up – Page manages to lend her a gravity and warmth that could have easily

FINGERPRINT

WHAT MAKES THIS GAME UNIQUE

CHOICE: It's not as open as *Heavy Rain* or as branching as *Fahrenheit*, but there are still crucial choices to be made which determine your own story.

IF JODIE IS THE STAR OF BEYOND: TWO SOULS THE MOVIE, THEN AIDEN IS THE STAR OF THE GAME



DETAILS

FORMAT: PlayStation 3
ORIGIN: France
PUBLISHER: Sony
DEVELOPER: Quantic Dream
PRICE: £49.99
RELEASE: 11 October
PLAYERS: 1-2
ONLINE REVIEWED: N/A

Below: With a bit more restraint, *Beyond* could have been a classic. As it is, it's merely essential. No bad thing, really.



Above: The sections where Jodie is a child are some of the game's most effective. The subject matter has been done before in countless movies, but the fact that you're interacting with the narrative elevates it considerably.

Left: Quite how much the game branches is unclear on a single playthrough. It definitely doesn't veer as much as *Heavy Rain* or *Fahrenheit*, but probably tells a more complete tale for its relative straightforwardness. Crucially, you still feel in control.



TWO CAN PLAY THAT GAME

Bizarrely, *Beyond* features a two-player mode where one controls Jodie and the other her ghostly partner, Aiden. It's a novel idea, and encouraging for players who wish to get typically non-gaming partners involved in the action (although controlling Aiden is the more 'gamey' of the two, requiring twin-stick dexterity). In practise, though, it's a little frustrating, as the already slow-pace is dampened further by extended periods of inaction. It's like the *Super Mario Galaxy* co-op, rather than anything truly revelatory. Still, credit for its inclusion, especially as Aiden is a character himself and not merely Jodie's power, meaning independent control functions well as a narrative device.

Inset: Both Page and Dafoe put in memorable performances (Page especially) but they're supported very well by an ensemble cast. The standard of acting overall is very good, and Cage's script for the most part is credible.

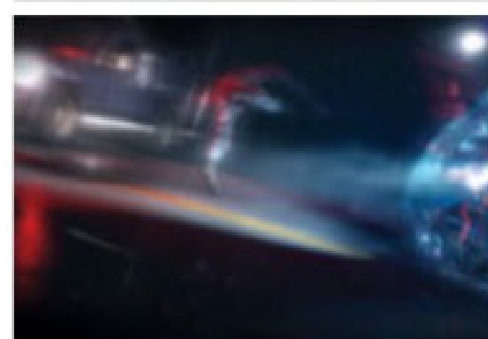


Inset: Some scenes lack narrative consistency – a huge challenge in a story of this type – but for the most part, it's rock solid.

TIMELINE HIGHLIGHTS

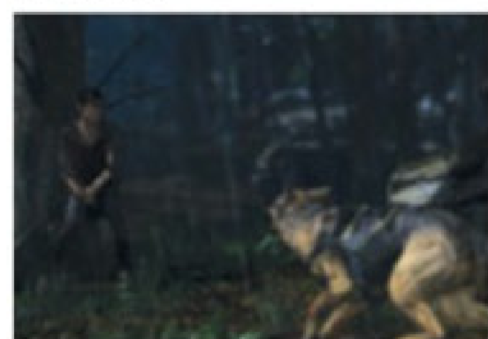
THE BEST BITS IN THE GAME AND WHEN YOU CAN EXPECT TO SEE THEM

40 MINS



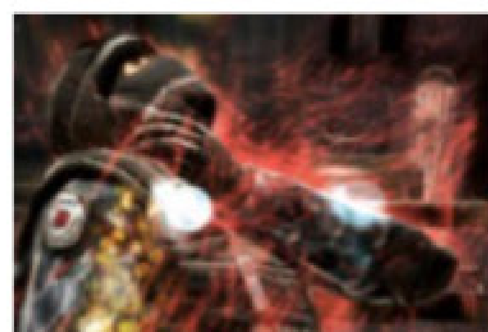
Great opening, amazing visuals, limited interactivity. An intriguing start to a game filled with promise. As striking as *Heavy Rain*'s opening, without being as ripe for obvious parody (press X to Jason).

2 HOURS



More intrigue, even more impressive visuals, and only a little bit of hokum. You've got the hang of how to control Aiden, and the story is finally beginning to unravel itself a bit.

10 HOURS



The end. Mild confusion for this reviewer, but there are multiple endings, not to mention some fairly obvious choices to explore. Thankfully, there is nothing here on a *Fahrenheit* level of abject stupidity.

been lost by an inferior actress. In a time where female roles in gaming are more scrutinised than ever, here we have a woman who at times is fiercely independent, powerful, introspective, talented and (whisper it) sexually confident. A human, then.

As the game is broken down into scenes (some little more than five minutes in length, some well over an hour) we are offered not just a story about a person with a power, but a story about how that person has to deal with that power. And the fact it's actually not a power at all, but a soul all unto itself.

At its best, *Beyond: Two Souls* is marvellously written and crafted. A scene where Jodie ends up homeless is insightful, thought-provoking and harsh, while one where she prepares her apartment for a date is both fascinating and occasionally hilarious; the game flicking between *Bridget Jones* neurosis and *Poltergeist* prop-hurling.

If Jodie is the star of *Beyond: Two Souls* the movie, then, Aiden is the star of the game. At almost any point in the action, the player can hit Triangle and become Aiden (pronounced I-den, oddly). From here, you can float around the world like a detached free camera in a *Halo* replay, flying around the room and even through walls. Aiden can manipulate certain people and items in the world using simple and consistent twin-stick inputs, meaning he can act as a poltergeist, flinging stuff around the place like a moody teenager, or go as far as actively possessing an NPC.

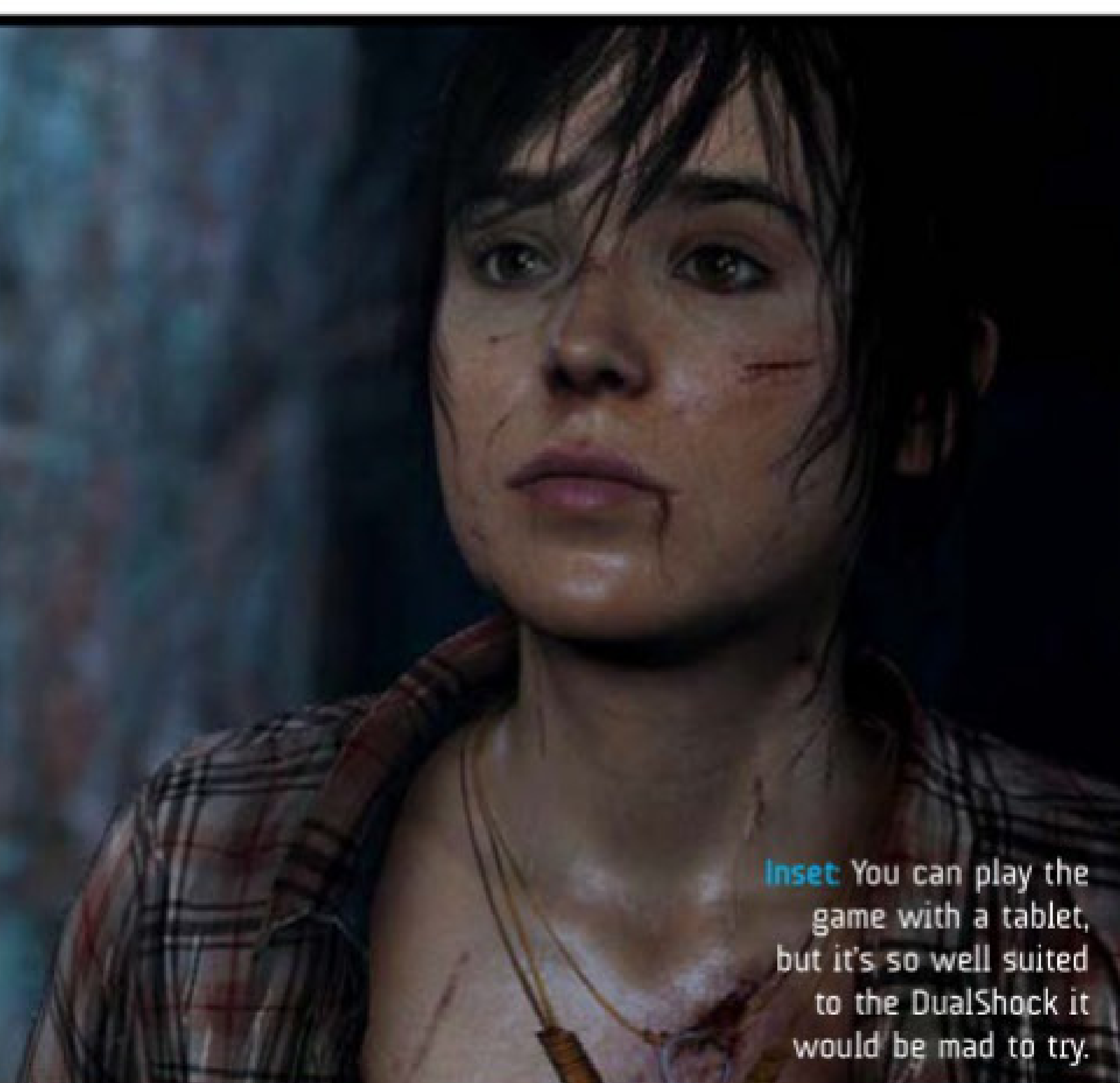
When and where Aiden can do any of this is entirely prescribed by the creators, so even sections that feel like puzzles are largely a case of finding and activating predetermined triggers. Nevertheless, using Aiden is oddly empowering, especially when you figure out ways to mess with the other characters in the game. It's both a fun toy and an effective plot device, and is *Beyond*'s furthest departure from Cage's previous work.

FACE TIME

Bar a few awkward moments and the occasional stilted expression, *Beyond*'s facial and full-body animation is nothing short of revelatory. It has the flexibility and convincing reality of *LA Noire*'s uncanny valley-troubling visages, but attached to bodies that don't look like they've been yanked from a Lego game. Great care has been taken to make sure hair and lose clothing react appropriately in whatever weather a scene takes place, while the lighting and shadow models make the faces feel real. At times, it looks like a movie. It wouldn't be surprising if some people are tricked into thinking it is, especially when viewed from a distance.

Below: For all *Beyond: Two Souls*' artistic pretence, this is sci-fi nonsense. But so is *The Matrix* and *Inception* – so this shouldn't read as a criticism. While the game is fundamentally daft, it's still profound and at times, revelatory.





Inset: You can play the game with a tablet, but it's so well suited to the DualShock it would be mad to try.



Left: The PS3's exclusive games are a cut above the 360's in terms of breadth and ambition.





Above: As you can see, the visuals are astounding. The face capture technology is a new benchmark, and the animation is marvellous. Along with *The Last Of Us*, the PS3 is proving to have plenty of gas in the tank late in its life.

Some may find the inconsistent nature of Aiden's interactivity to be frustrating, but the world Cage has created is bound by mystery and confusion, so it's easy enough to let such 'gamey' tropes slide. It all pieces together to conjure a story that manages to be personal and touching, despite its overfamiliarity (to movies, rather than games).

Sadly, Cage's lack of discipline when it comes to reining in the wilder sides of his imagination does leave *Beyond: Two Souls* overreaching it self during certain scenes. When it shows restraint, this is the erstwhile creator's best work, but its keenness to ramp everything up to a blockbuster frequency is the game's truest weakness.

An extended sortie to the desert feels totally out of place and unnecessary, and the game's finale – while captivating – strips it of much of its quiet charm, all explosions and bluster. In a two hour film, these excesses would spoil the party completely, but there is still 80 per cent of *Beyond* which shows subtlety and care in its scripting. Don't be misled – this is still sci-fi bunkum of the more ludicrous order, but it manages to build a world that's logically consistent, and worthwhile characters to fill it. Even the worrying '*Splinter Cell*' section seen at E3 is actually a gem – and only a small part of the game as a whole.

And that's the beauty of Cage's framework. As a method for delivering the type of stories he wants to tell, it's fantastic because it allows gameplay to change constantly, meaning a story can take place during the times when you're clutching the controller as opposed to inbetween. It's his own canvas, and it really works. Cage's quotes are often sneered at and derided as the lamentations of an arrogant and misguided creator who yearns to be a filmmaker. In truth, though, he's a true visionary; someone who believes in the power of games and of interactivity. *Beyond: Two Souls* is his most ambitious and complete work to date, and while it might lack the threat of *Heavy Rain*'s disposable protagonists, it replaces it with unimaginable polish and technical magicianship. It's a relief, in many ways, then, that Cage has crafted a game that can actually do the talking for him, that's obviously not the folly of a creator drunk on grandeur. Critics of the director will take their shots at the occasional tonal jarring in bringing so many elements together in the story, but ultimately, *Beyond* is anything but a vanity project. It's the credible next step from the ideas debuted in *Fahrenheit* and further honed in *Heavy Rain*, the hallmarks of a creator finding new room to grow with each new project. On this trajectory of work, Cage's storytelling ambitions may be fully realised by his next project on PS4, and that prospect will be energising for those willing to hear him out.

Not all videogames should be like *Beyond: Two Souls*. But be thankful that some are. Another flawed but essential tale from a man who genuinely cares and a publisher that believes in the power of videogames.

BEYOND: TWO SOULS IS CAGE'S MOST AMBITIOUS AND COMPLETE WORK TO DATE

ENHANCED
IMPROVING ON THE ORIGINAL

CONVINCE ME: *Beyond*'s performances are far less wooden that some of *Heavy Rain*'s, especially in the supporting cast.
QTFREE: Action sequences feel more organic, and the animation flows much better.

FAQs

Q. HOW'S ELLEN PAGE?
Genuinely brilliant. She throws herself into what must be a very challenging role, and produces one of the great gaming performances.

Q. AND DAFOE?
Less outstanding, partly due to his character, partly due to his acting, but still a cut above.

Q. BETTER THAN HEAVY RAIN?
Yes and no. It's more polished and convincing, but the lack of genuine threat strips it of some of its dramatic potential.

VERDICT 8/10
AN AUDIOVISUAL BENCHMARK. FLAWED, BUT ESSENTIAL

AT ITS MAGNIFICENT BEST AND FRUSTRATING WORST

Total War: Rome II

Things are looking bleak for Publius Oppius Rullus. He and his men are outnumbered four to one by hordes of half-naked Celts. After a long campaign of attrition in Britain he's down to only a handful of legionaries, supported by some rubbish javelin tossing peasants. Hundreds of bowmen are bombarding him and his men, battering them and pinning them down. He barks an order and forms the testudo, ordering his men to raise their shields above their heads to protect themselves. Publius's men are holding their ground, but even with their superior training they're no match for this many Celts. Fortunately, there is hope: Just off the eastern shore is Faustus Gratius Lurco, a young, inexperienced general with a collection of fresh soldiers and mercenaries from Africa. If Publius can just hold on, Faustus can save his noble bacon.

This is when *Rome II* is at its best, sending a group of elite soldiers half-way across the world to stab a bunch of shirtless blue men in the guts. It's what *Total War* has always excelled at, a huge turn-based campaign married to incredible real-time battles. When it works well you can almost feel the history bleeding through the screen. Sadly, it does not always work well.

Rome always stood out from the other *Total War* games because of its story, namely the fact that it actually had one. Specifically, it had a twist. At some point you would become so powerful that Rome would turn against you, declaring you an enemy of the state and forcing you to fight a civil war.

Nowadays this twist resides in the faction tab. Click on it and you'll find a list of Roman political leaders, many of them also your generals, whose victories earn influence for their faction. If your influence gets too high then Rome will turn against you, but you can jockey for position by assassinating characters, arranging marriages and spreading vicious rumours. It works like a simple, accessible version of *Crusader Kings II*. It's a fantastic idea that expands on *Rome*'s key concept and captures the backstabbing nature of Roman politics. So, it's a crying shame that it doesn't really work.

For some reason assassinating a rival politician actually lowers your influence and raises his. In fact all the underhanded actions do this, making you question why you'd use any of them. Why does killing a man help him more than it does you? It's bafflingly counter-intuitive, and the game makes absolutely no effort to explain what's going on. Even if you do elect to spend hours playing these counter-intuitive political games, it rarely feels like it's having any effect. By the time the twist finally happens, 40 or 50 hours in, you've inevitably stopped caring about the factions. We wanted to feel like Caesar and Brutus, but instead we're cast as Nero, fiddling with a pointless menu while Rome burns. The faction system's only saving grace is that if you simply ignore it the game will just play out much like the first *Rome*.

What actually makes *Rome II* stand out is the interface. All the fiddly management screens of *Total War*s past are slimmed down and crammed into a tiny box in the centre of the screen. From that viewpoint you can easily manage the three or four cities that make up each Roman province at once.

ENHANCED

IMPROVING ON THE ORIGINAL

A GAME OF THRONES: Diplomacy is far easier and much more compelling than in *Total War: RomeII*. Client states and alliances mean you can build a network of satellite states without conquering.

WE WANTED TO FEEL LIKE CAESAR AND BRUTUS, BUT WE'RE NERO, FIDDLING WITH A POINTLESS MENU WHILE ROME BURNS



DETAILS

FORMAT: PC
ORIGIN: UK
PUBLISHER: Sega
DEVELOPER: The Creative Assembly
PRICE: £29.99
RELEASE: Out now
PLAYERS: 1-2 (campaign), 1-8 (battles)
MIN SPEC: 2 GHz Intel Dual Core/ 2.6 GHz Intel Single Core, 2GB RAM, 512 MB DirectX 9.0c compatible GPU (shader model 3, vertex texture fetch support), 35 GB HDD space
ONLINE REVIEWED: No

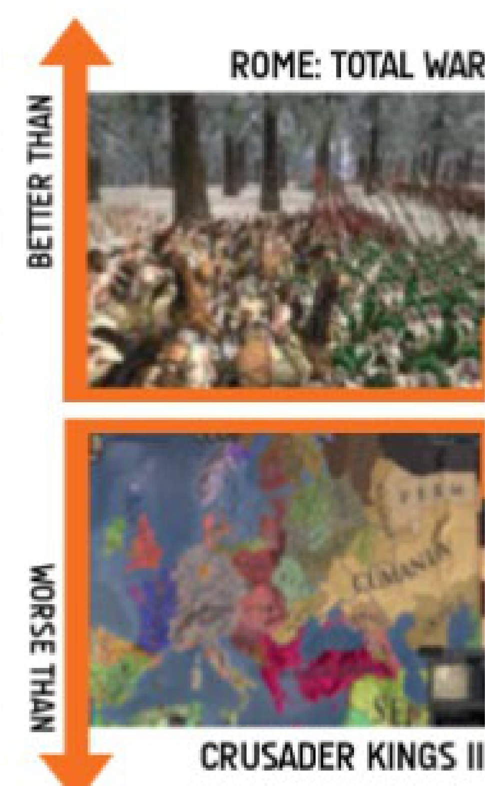
Below: Pressing Insert takes you into a cinematic view – perfect for those big cavalry charges.





Above: Roman strategy often degenerates into a heavy infantry meat grinder.

Left: Cavalry charges rarely fare well against elephants.



ANATOMY OF AN ALLIANCE

The diplomacy screen is the best way to see who's at war with who. The selected country is marked in yellow, while its allies are blue and its enemies are red. It's a straightforward way of keeping track of the variety of knotted allegiances you'll accumulate, gradually consuming the entirety of your world map. It also makes for a satisfying alternative to traditional empire building, with it's own challenges and dilemmas. At one point our network of alliances became so complicated that two allies sparked off and started fighting each other, forcing us to pick a side.

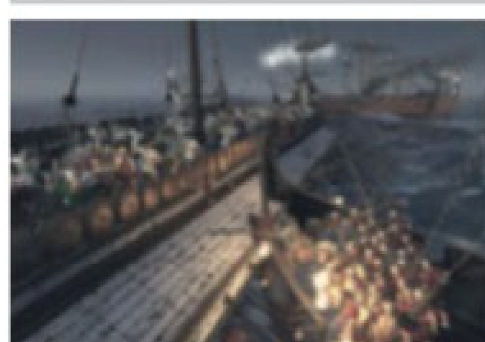
Inset: Ramming is the primary method of settling battles at sea.



TIMELINE HIGHLIGHTS

THE BEST BITS IN THE GAME AND WHEN YOU CAN EXPECT TO SEE THEM

30 MINS



Just starting out, duffing up the Eustracian League. For newcomers there are a lot of mechanics to learn from scratch, but the improved interface really helps break players into proceedings.

14 HOURS



Invading Carthage by sea. Coastal assaults yield more interesting results than naval battles every single time in *Total War: Rome II*. Still room for improvement in this series, then.

7 DAYS



Finally making it to Britain. The drama of large-scale conflict is palpable, with siege units adding so much tangible scale to the chaotic battles that the game handles so well.

The same is true of technology: what was once frustrating busywork is now simple, quick and rendered in a beautiful Grecian urn art style. Re-organising cities – once a chore – is now a joy, and only takes seconds instead of minutes.

Diplomacy too is hugely improved, offering us the scheming politics that the faction system so expertly fails at. Alliances are easier to pull off, and smaller states can be bullied into becoming a subservient client state. The system was so easy to use that our game rapidly transformed into *Rome: Total Peace*. By using spare cash to love-bomb nearby empires into teaming up, we managed to build our own version of the UN in 250 BC. The only problem was that so many alliances meant that any conflict would spark a dozen declarations of war, until eventually half the world was involved. It was not unusual to see Egyptians sieging a city in France at the behest of the Greeks.

Unfortunately that siege wasn't as exciting as it sounds, because *Rome*'s AI still can't handle the very simple concept of an enclosed fort. In one notable siege battle we took part in, a group of defending spearmen spent the entire time opening the castle gates, charging forward towards our cavalry and then changing their minds and going home. Meanwhile, our forces found it impolite to exploit this strategic blunder and refused to even try and enter until it was too late. It's all the more frustrating because the new siege equipment looks and feels fantastic, and having your Legions mount the walls on giant ladders works brilliantly. Sadly, the defenders will be running aimlessly in circles when they get there.

NOT BUILT IN A DAY

The new provincial management screen makes city building much quicker and easier to get to grips with. All four cities in this region are managed at once, buildings are colour-coded for easy reading and a simple drop-down menu lets us upgrade a building, tear it down or replace it with another of the same type. You could switch a Shrine to Pegasus, which improves money-making abilities, with a Temple Of Minerva to improve research speed. A greyed-out button on the far left of the screen also allows players to set 'edicts' when in possession of the whole province.

Below:: There's a huge variety of battlefield scenery.





Left: Soldiers dynamically react to attacks by moving their shields.

Right: Cavalry are strong against the Legion, but the barbarians rarely use them in high numbers.



Above: Pressing Tab in battle takes you to a zoomed-out strategic map.



Left: The new province management screen is a huge improvement.

MAKE NO MISTAKE, WE'D MUCH RATHER PLAY THIS THAN ANY OTHER GAME IN THE SERIES

Sieges don't happen very often, but when they do they show off the big problem with *Rome II*: far too many of *Total War*'s old flaws just haven't been fixed. Campaign AI will still send tiny and annoying enemy armies to buzz around your land, forcing you to beat them two or three times before they finally die. Auto-resolve rarely gets the balance of power right, forcing you to play manually in every tough battle and the loading sequence as the game calculates enemy movement eventually becomes longer than your actual turn.

And of course, just as it did in *Empire* and *Shogun*, The Creative Assembly has come up with an entire new naval battle system and, just like *Empire* and *Shogun*, it's tremendously dull. Sails have become oars, and the result is a strangely static affair that is devoid of all momentum. Despite the vast array of ranged ships available, most battles rapidly degenerate into a confused melee of ramming and boarding, with the winner generally being whoever had the most big and sturdy ships.

FAQs

Q. HOW DO BARBARIANS WORK?
Tribal societies and monarchies reverse the faction mechanic. They start on top and must not show any weakness.

Q. WHO SHOULD I PLAY AS?
Rome is best for newcomers, the Iceni and Egypt should appeal to experienced players.

Q. WHERE'S MY FOOD?
When you take a region out of taxes, you also take it out of the food pool. Tax it again.

Amphibious units though? Those are amazing. As soon as your armies walk onto water they become troop transports, and thanks to the emphasis on ramming and boarding, they're surprisingly capable, almost eliminating the need for the navy altogether. But the real magic happens when they reach a coastal battle. Instead of starting on foot your troops must begin on their boats, forcing them to smash through any naval defenders and land on the shore before disembarking and marching onto the battlefield.

Not only does this look and feel amazing, but it opens up amazing potential for flanking attacks, as Faustus can attest. His Numidian javelin throwers and Praetorian Guard have now landed on the beach and disembarked from the boats. They've got a clear path to the Celt's flank. Publius might well live after all. One of the cavalry units gets stuck on his ship for some reason, but there are more than enough men to chop the barbarians to pieces. He orders his war dogs let loose and they hare around the battlefield, completely out of our control, destroying the lightly armoured Celts. It's all over. Publius lives.

WORLDWIDE
TAKING GAMING ONLINE

INTERNATIONAL WAR: Two players can join in on a campaign, either as allies or as enemies. Up to eight can play in custom one-off battles.

Rome is a terribly frustrating game to review. That classic *Total War* experience is there, and better than ever before. Make no mistake, we'd much rather play this than any other game in the series. But the faction system is a major disappointment and the developers still haven't fixed the biggest flaws of *Total War*s past. In earlier times we may have overlooked these flaws, but The Creative Assembly has been making these games for 12 years now and, much like Caesar, it can no longer be forgiven for flawed ambition.

VERDICT 7/10
POOR AI RUINS A WOULD-BE CLASSIC



Above: Travelling by boat was a slow process originally, to mask long loading times, while the Wii U is said to be capable of loading the entire Great Sea all at once.

FIRST TIMERS: SAY HELLO TO YOUR GAME OF THE YEAR

The Legend Of Zelda: The Wind Waker HD

If you own a Nintendo Wii U and have never played *The Wind Waker* before, there are no two ways about it: this new HD remake is utterly indispensable. As shrewd, charming and devious as any of Link's other post-*Ocarina* adventures, it's a game that only shows its age via a few intermittent control quirks, the likes of which are rarely seen today. But again: this is a project that shows Nintendo's incomparable EAD studio operating at peak capacity, and rookies shouldn't hesitate to pick it up. This is what your Wii U was purchased for.

For returning *Wind Waker* veterans, this HD redux is almost as easy to recommend, albeit with a few (very) minor caveats. On the whole, this is the same dazzling near-masterpiece that first arrived back in mid-2003, but the complete reluctance to tinker with some of the more problematic control issues is at once completely understandable and quietly infuriating. Remixing cardinal gameplay elements in titles as vast and complicated as this one must be akin to toying with a brittle house of cards, but some of the more archaic kinks can't help but sour the flavour a little bit. Outside of combat, the game still (essentially) revolves around the usage of a single button. In addition to the usual issues that arise in that situation – performing an evasive manoeuvre when you're attempting to pick up an item, for example – the surfeit of buttons on the Wii U Gamepad make its lack of a customisable "hardcore" control method seem like a bit of a missed opportunity.

Similarly, you'll still have to exit and then re-enter rooms if you want its essential perishables to respawn. Changing to a first-person viewpoint still involves having to cue Link up first, because it has nothing to do with the camera's perspective and everything to do with Link's. And you'll still get bored of travelling between islands way before you happen upon the invaluable Warp song; in fact, you'll tire even after you've shelled out for this version's much-appreciated new "Swift" sail, which renders your ship almost twice as fast.

DETAILS

FORMAT: Wii U
ORIGIN: Japan
PUBLISHER: Nintendo
DEVELOPER: Nintendo EAD
PRICE: £49.99
RELEASE: Out Now
PLAYERS: 1
ONLINE REVIEWED: N/A

THE WIND WAKER IS SMART, FLAMBOYANT AND SEEMINGLY ALWAYS ONE STEP AHEAD OF YOU

FAQs

Q. IS THE SAILING BORING?
Fans have always been split on the matter, but you now have an option to buy a faster sail for your ship after defeating the game's second boss.

Q. ARE OTHER CONTROL METHODS AVAILABLE?
Sadly there's currently no support offered for the Wiimote and Nunchuck, but the Pro Controller is supported.

Q. CAN THE WHOLE THING BE PLAYED ON THE GAMEPAD?
Yes, but if you have the opportunity to play it in all of its 1080p HD glory, leap on it.



Below: The notoriously long-winded Triforce Shard Quest has been shortened in the HD version; you now only require a few Triforce Charts to find all of the shards.



Right: This version runs beautifully at 1080p and 60fps, compared to the GameCube version's 480p and 30fps.

Below: If you don't feel like using the left thumbstick to aim in first-person mode, the Gamepad's gyroscope is an appealing alternative.





Wii U Gamepad implementation is also far from perfect. The unbending sensitivity of the unit's thumbsticks (so beneficial in first-person shooters like *Black Ops 2*) clearly hasn't been optimised for the software, and there's no way of modifying it. This means that (initially, at least) the process of lining up your grappling hook or accurately hurling a boomerang can be a skittish pain in the neck when you're under pressure. Likewise, conducting music with the *Wind Waker* baton takes quite a bit of getting used to, simply because the game inexplicably demands needle-point precision from you, irrespective of whether you're using the thumbsticks or the touchscreen.

But because none of these quibbles are game-breaking – and because all of them can be adapted to – after a couple of hours they briskly wither into outright insignificance. *The Wind Waker* really is a scintillating piece of entertainment: smart, flamboyant and seemingly always one step ahead of you, it's a game that almost appears to have been custom-built as a response to anyone who's ever dared to question Nintendo's evergreen status in the games industry. It's destined to be perennially locked in a three-way fan quarrel between *Skyward Sword* and *Twilight Princess* – esteemed company indeed – but the truth is that there's something truly idiosyncratic and singularly bewitching about *The Wind Waker*.

For one thing, it's worth noting that the once controversial cel-shaded art style has effectively rendered it timeless. Back in 2003, to play it was to feel as if you were interacting directly with a live cartoon, and that feeling is exacerbated by the breathtaking new HD sheen. Whether you're observing Link's wide-eyed responses to any and all questions about his/your quest, or watching a menacing thunder storm glide steadily towards you, it's both awe-inspiring to behold and quite desperately absorbing. The ongoing quest for photo-realism has never felt less fertile.

But while *The Wind Waker* stands alone aesthetically, the gameplay is in the same classic mould as its duo of Wii brethren. Combat is taut and always forces you to experiment, the forest-dwelling Koroks are a ludicrously adorable new addition to the character roster, and the climactic boss battle is one of the finest in *Zelda* history. If your memories remain fond, this HD remake will leave them completely unspoiled. Steadfast *Zelda* devotees will also be pleased to hear that *Skyward Sword*'s rock-hard Hero Mode makes an appearance here too, and is thankfully available right from the start. It isn't so much a difficulty setting as an option for supplementary punishment: enemies not only deal twice as much damage, they'll also never drop a single recovery heart.

Another significant bonus on Wii U is that the stop-start nature of the original is now gone forever, because your map and inventory now permanently sit on the Gamepad's touchscreen. It's difficult to understate what a huge benefit this is: you'll no longer be forced to consult your map every couple of minutes while tackling the devilish Earth temple, and re-assigning tools and weapons on the fly is a nimble, drag-and-drop pleasure.

So if you've played it before, you should leap on the opportunity to revisit *The Wind Waker* in all of its newfound visual glory. And if this is your first time tackling the hazardous waters of the Great Sea, feel free to view the below score as an horrendous insult.

MISSING LINK

WHAT WE WOULD CHANGE

ALL FOR ONE: Having one primary action button continues to be a real boon for younger players, but the option to use a more involved control scheme really wouldn't have gone amiss.

BOTTLE JOB

The GameCube version of *The Wind Waker* featured a Tingle Tuner: a small device, discovered on your travels, that heavily resembled a Game Boy Advance. After finding it, you could hook your GBA up to your Cube and be given permanent access to a map, and periodic invites for a co-op player to assume the role of Tingle, the fairy-obsessed series stalwart. The Wii U version has replaced this with something called the Tingle Bottle, which allows you to throw messages into the Great Sea, to be discovered and opened by a random player via Miiverse. Sadly the system wasn't live at the time of writing.



VERDICT 9/10
A JOY FOR FANS, A MUST FOR NEWCOMERS

STOCK, WESTERN-STYLE MMO DESIGN WITH LOTS OF CHOCOBOS AND MOOGLES SPRINKLED ON THE TOP

WHAT'S NEW IN A REALM REBORN

For players of the original (who get the game and a month for free), this version is essentially a whole new game. It's a new engine, a new story, new quests and updated zones. New jobs have been added, notably Summoner. The world now regularly erupts into public quests – FATE (Full Active Time Events). Missing character genders have been added, including male cat-people. Combat, while still slow, is faster. The interface is much less painful, with the exception of the map, which is now an official torture device. Essentially, everything has been given a polish. It's still the same world though, so if you didn't care for its general design and vibe before, that won't have changed. Conversely, if you did, it shouldn't be tricky to get back into the swing of things after the break.



SEQUEL? REMAKE? SQUARE'S SECOND TRY AT ITS SECOND MMORPG IS A BIT OF BOTH

Final Fantasy XIV: A Realm Reborn

DETAILS

FORMAT: PC
OTHER FORMATS: PS3
ORIGIN: Japan
PUBLISHER: Square Enix
DEVELOPER: In-house
PRICE: £19.99 (+£8.99 per month)
RELEASE: Out now
PLAYERS: MMO
MINIMUM SPEC: Core i5 2.6Ghz, 4GB RAM, 2GB 3D card, 20GB HD, broadband connection
ONLINE REVIEWED: Yes

Most MMO worlds are lucky if they only have one cataclysm to clean up after. *Final Fantasy XIV*'s Eorzea has two – a suitably dramatic meteor strike declaring the end of an age of prosperity and the dawn of an Umbral Era for the land, and far more devastatingly, Square Enix openly admitting that *Final Fantasy XIV* was a miserable failure. It stopped billing subscribers, and finally the game was outright pulled so that the team could not so much polish it up as smash it to atoms with sledgehammers and rebuild it. This is the result.

Not too surprisingly, *A Realm Reborn* is a strange game, made all the odder by the fact that in most ways it's a stock Western-style MMO with lots of chocobos and moogles sprinkled on the top. It's not a direct copy though, more a recreation as seen through a slightly distorted lens – or perhaps more appropriately, a game that feels like its core team understand the genre, but handed out their instructions to the rest via a crackling telephone.

It does some extremely smart things, like giving all players a full set of bags and extra inventory space just for key items and armour. It also does some staggeringly clueless ones, like launching with no idle-timeout, meaning the servers quickly filled to bursting point with characters just standing around. And then there's some that are just plain inexplicable. One random, admittedly mild example: as a Thaumaturge, your "Blizzard" spell throws a ball of ice at an enemy. "Blizzard II" though is a totally different, area attack. Was some variant like "Blizzaga" simply too hard to type? Another frustration is a quest tracker that doesn't bother distinguishing between quests at your level, and random jobs beneath your heroic notice.

We'll get to more of that soon enough, but first, a primer. As ever, *FFXIV* is about creating a hero and seeking fame and fortune in fantasyland – Eorzea being mostly magic and monsters, but with some elements of magitek slowly seeping in courtesy of the baddies.

Even with a new engine powering the visuals, it's an unimpressive place. Some areas, like the forests of one starting area, Gridania, look attractive enough, while others, notably the dry plains of Thanalan, would have looked behind the times in 2010. *FFXIV* needing to run on the PS3 as well as the PC certainly doesn't help it stand out next to the likes of *Guild Wars 2*, but rarely does it have the life or atmosphere of even the now ancient *World Of Warcraft* – predictable JRPG art direction not helped by cramped map design, with even outdoor space often built around glorified corridors, and sparsely populated with points of interest. There are some sights worth exploring for, and a few terrific vistas and cut-scenes, but they're few and far between.

FINGERPRINT

WHAT MAKES THIS GAME UNIQUE

CHOCOBO, HO: You can name it, ride it, and it plays the music as you travel. Quietly while stopped, loud while running.
FAMILIAR FACES: You'll see a few. For starters, *FFXIII*'s Lightning is paying a visit to Eorzea soon.

Characters are thankfully more interesting. You pick a starting class, like the aforementioned Thaumaturge, at the start (classic *FF* roles like Black Mage become available later), but anyone can ultimately be everything. To change class, you simply change weapon – the first time at least almost certainly leaving you publicly standing in your pants due to none of your clothes and armour being available to your new vocation. Even if you don't care about, say, teaching your Thaumaturge to be a Gladiator or giving your sword-wielding hero a second career weaving shirts to sell to other players, there are reasons to spread out a bit, not least being able to use a few cross-job skills. This is also the only real way to influence character development, which otherwise doles out stock skills at set levels and after completing dedicated class quests rather than offering scope to buy what you want and specialise within a field.

Combat is firmly one of the areas where *FFXIV* shows its work. It feels glacial compared to most MMOs, and lacks any dodging moves or other action elements, but can be surprisingly complex. Even as a rookie Thaumaturge for instance, you're not simply throwing ice and fire. Fire is by far the most powerful, and gets more so the more you

Left: Your first airship ride is hugely dramatic… then you realise the world's small enough to just walk across.



Above: Oh no. A meeting like this can only mean one thing. Incredibly long-winded speech incoming!





Left: Level 10 enemies really, really need to get a better sense of their place on the power curve.

cast it in a row. The cost rises along with it though, so it has to be balanced with regular shots of ice – which also boosts magic regeneration. Played well, you never run out of juice, with Ether potions a last resort.

Not only does this help make combat more satisfying, it's secretly teaching players from the start to use combos and think a bit more about skills in a way that most MMOs simply expect everyone to already know. In fact, *FFXIV* does a better job at teaching the basics than almost any of the competition, taking time to do things like give mages direct training in working with tanks (tough fighters who keep the enemies busy and at a distance), and dedicated group quests where random players are pulled together to practice simple situations before even getting close to a dungeon. If only everything in *FFXIV* was this well thought out, it could have been an amazing MMO.

Instead, these great moments are trapped in a mire of oddness and bland content. Even by MMO standards, the opening hours are torturous, with more running around and fetching people's shopping than even a rookie hero should have to put up with. *Guild Wars 2* has you fight dragons. *World Of Warcraft* has dramatic narrative starting areas. Here, "Please would you get me some orange juice?" gets a flashy fanfare and triumphant "QUEST ACCEPTED!" The MMO genre has long advanced beyond the point of this being acceptable.

The best quests are instanced, offering scripted battles without other players breaking the illusion that you personally are crucial to the future of this world, and FATE quests, which are public events that spring up around the map and can be joined simply by running up and doing whatever the pop-up text says. Most of the time you're just doing busywork, far too much of which involves backtracking across the world, and trying to avoid having to do 'levequests' – repeatable activities usually known in MMO circles as a 'daily', whose name comes from a fusion of the word 'queste', from the Old French for 'shit to do', and 'leve', ancient Aramaic for 'boring'.

Getting around is a nightmare, thanks to one of the worst maps implemented in a game – with lapses like it not updating until you close and open it again, and with misleading labels that show no clue of how to handle the level designers' love of stairs and loops – and a mind-boggling teleport system that presents unlocked cities as a list rather than a map and then makes you run from the main teleport crystal to a smaller one for local travel. And that's if they're there at all. Several key locations don't have one, notably Vesper Bay, despite it being home to a secret society who just loves dragging you across the world for a quick chat.

FAQs

Q. HOW DOES THE CLASS SYSTEM WORK?
You pick one at the start, but can sign up for others and upgrade it mid-way through the game. Gear sets make it easy to kit out every class with its own weapons/armour.

Q. IS FFXIV MORE SOLO FRIENDLY THAN XI?
Much. You do have to do group content like dungeons to progress, but get auto-grouped for that. The personal quest and standard heroics are generally okay for any lone wolf.

Q. WHEN DO I GET MY CHOCOBO?
Level 20, but you can rent them and get taxi rides before that. You're invited to join a faction during the story, after fighting Ifrit. Do some of their errands, they give you one.



Right: Battlemechs look tough, but you're tougher. He's about to be one dazed ex-machina.

These lapses are especially maddening for being so obvious. Why do you instead have to teleport to the town of Horizon and ride a chocobo for a minute just to check in with your fellow world-saviours? It's as if nobody making the game ever fired it up and actually played the damn thing. Another, bigger frustration hits around Level 15, when players are forced to complete three dungeons in a row – long, group-only content in which a team of a tank, healer and two damage-dealers go up against tougher enemies and bosses – before the main story continues.

To be clear, *one* dungeon makes sense, and in fact it's to *FFXIV*'s credit that it continues to force players into them at regular intervals rather than treating its personal storyline as a single-player game that only remembers to become multiplayer at the end. A particular highlight comes in the 20s, when everyone has to fight Ifrit in a basic but still gloves-off 'proper' boss fight that most MMOs would save for the level cap. Three at once though is ridiculous, not least for potentially condemning damage-focused players to spend hours just waiting in queues for a turn, right as the game finally opens up. Adding insult to injury, that neat tutorial showing mages how to work with their tanking colleagues? Great addition. Too bad it comes *after* these dungeons, too late for all but the slowest player.

For all the frustration though, *FFXIV* knows how to turn on the charm when it wants to. It's in the little details, like the Chocobo Theme playing as you ride around the countryside, some adorable

ENHANCED

IMPROVING ON THE ORIGINAL

***FFXI* VS. *FFXIV*:** Far less sadistic than Square's first MMO, especially to solo players. Would be one of the better starter-MMOs around if the opening hours of questing and levelling up weren't so crushingly dull.

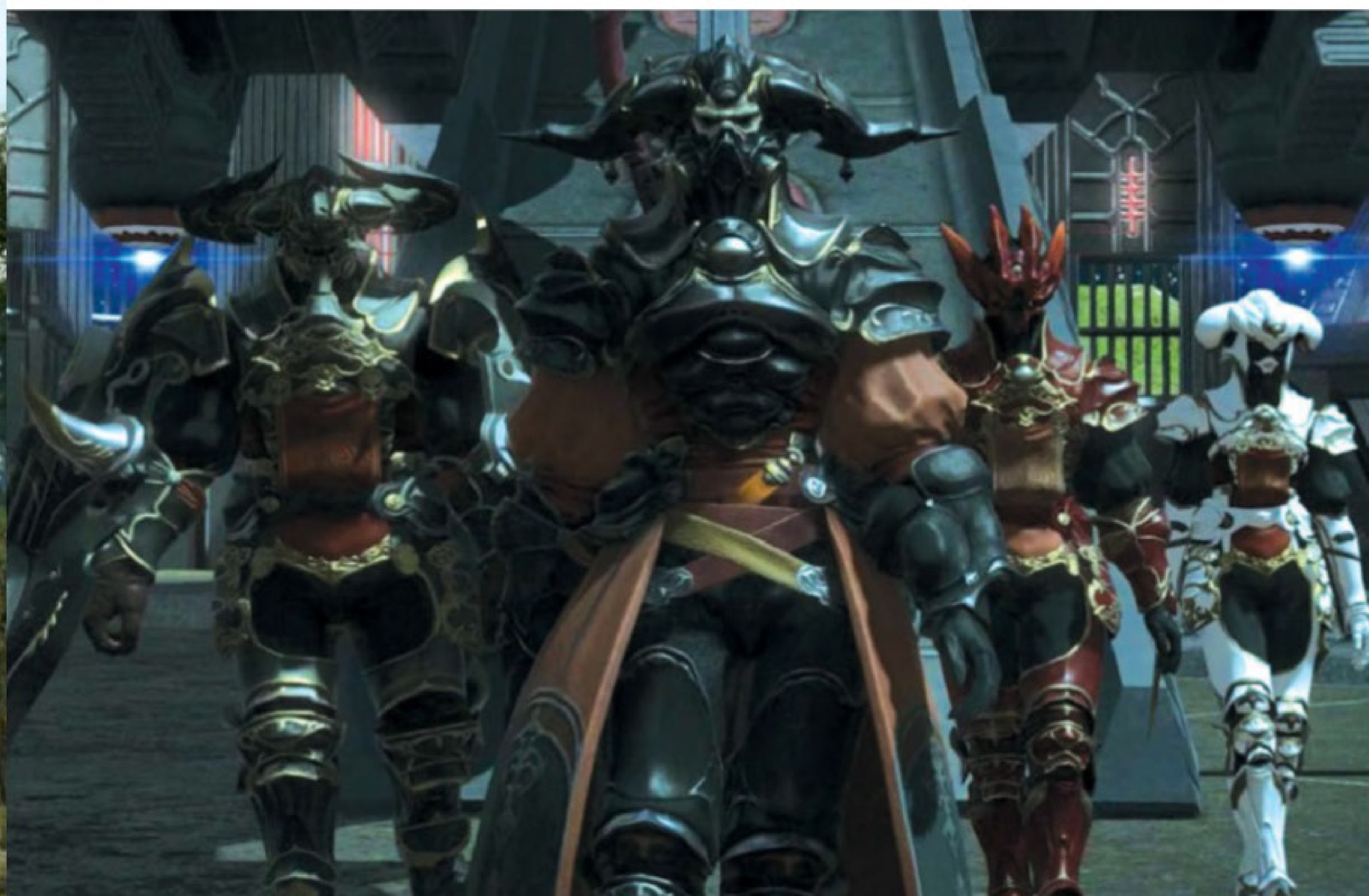


Above: Most enemies are fair game, though some quests assign players specific enemies to take out for credit.



Right: Being kicked down to Level 1 for each new class is annoying, but progress is easy enough.

Below: Who are the baddies? Tough to say. It's a subtle mix of shades of grey...



TIMELINE HIGHLIGHTS

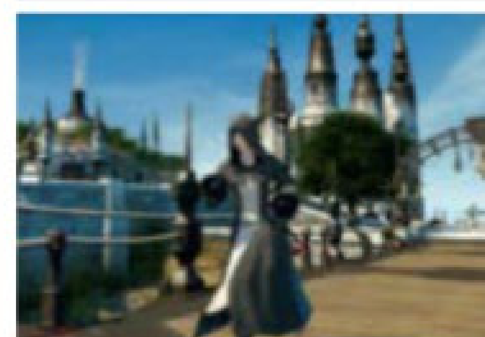
THE BEST BITS IN THE GAME AND WHEN YOU CAN EXPECT TO SEE THEM

1 HOUR



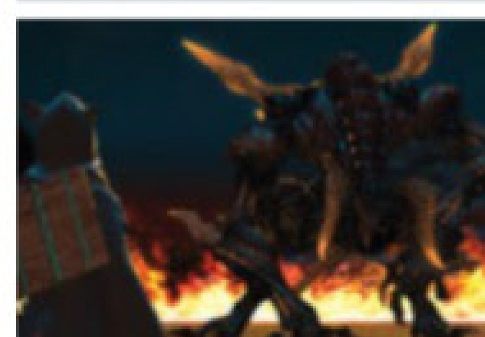
Boredom sets in as quests inevitably lead to endless errands. On the plus side, there's lots of them. Don't sweep though. You'll need some for levelling up at least one other class.

5 HOURS



Focusing on the story quest, you're made an envoy to the other nations and dungeons start unlocking. Now you can really play with others and explore beyond your starting area.

10 HOURS



Slaying Ifrit makes you a celebrity, and you're recruited by one of Eorzea's factions. Minor odd-jobs give way to political struggles, with the threat of more evil Primals ever-looming.



FACING IFRIT

He's not the first boss, but he's a baptism of fire for new players, and a real party-killer. Instead of purely relying on a tank to soak damage, all players need to keep moving to avoid the huge explosive traps he throws down, as well as avoiding his devastating fire breath up close. It's a tight arena, with little room for error. Mid-way through, he places an 'Infernal Nail'. At this point, forget Ifrit and his demon-halitosis. Destroy the nail, fast! There's little room for error, but if it's still up when an invisible counter finishes ticking, he gets to one-hit kill the party. Survive that, and he's yours to polish off. For now. There's a rematch later where he doesn't play so nicely. It's a nice nod to *Final Fantasy* enthusiasts while being a good introduction to the boss style for newcomers.

characters like the childlike Lalafell who don't let their size stop them being as badass as the elves and catpeople and beasts they live alongside, and the use of emotes in quests (like crying to mollify some merchants). It's also in the often bizarre script, with high fantasy speeches about crystals and whatever seeming to constantly rub against translators who give quests names like "Fate Is A Fecal Mistress", name a pub "The Pissed Peiste" and stuff the NPC dialogue full of Briticisms like 'Bugger me' and 'Enough of this mummer's farce!' The result is odd, but a lot more endearing than the awful opening hours and adherence to old MMO design tropes initially suggest.

For a game relying on the retail box plus subscription model though, 'endearing' doesn't really cut it, and the number of frustrations to deal with soon form a big, less than pretty pile. At heart, even updated, *FFXIV* is a game clawing its way to adequacy rather than one with the drive to get to the stars, with a core that constantly shows its systems' age. The *Final Fantasy* elements are more dusted onto the experience than the heart of it, and while PS3 players aren't exactly drowning in alternative MMOs to fire up and explore, the PC is a battlefield

A LOT MORE ENDEARING THAN THE AWFUL OPENING AND ADHERENCE TO OLD MMO DESIGN INITIALLY SUGGESTS

that demands brand new ideas or a much more consistent level of quality. In areas like character freedom, teaching the ropes, and remembering that it's an MMO without making it impossible to fly solo, *FFXIV* does well. Too much of the rest though just feels like a safe, but clumsily inferior retread of other games – *Guild Wars 2* in particular.

A Realm Reborn certainly succeeds at upgrading its failed first version into a respectable MMO, and for disappointed or existing fans, that may be enough. As its own beast though, it's simply okay; certainly nothing that will change our world as much as the last couple of years worth of tweaks and upgrades have managed to change its own.





VERDICT 6/10

A HALF-SUCCESSFUL REWRITE OF THE ORIGINAL

COLD HANDS. WARM ROBOT

Lost Planet 3

Of the many mysteries in this world, few can be tougher to explain than the existence of *Lost Planet 3*. On the surface, a third entrant into a reasonably popular videogame franchise is nothing especially unusual, but *Lost Planet 3* doesn't feel like anything like its predecessors. It's more like a SyFy TV sequel – handled by different people, attempting to tell a completely different story, both in the cut-scenes and gameplay. Moreover, it's not very good. So why does it exist?

One man who's probably best to ask is Jim Peyton, *Lost Planet 3*'s working-man hero and owner of one of the strangest personalities in all of gaming. Perhaps it's because he's blighted by a face that looks like a cross between Nicolas Cage and an avocado, or perhaps it's the fact that he has possibly the worst job in the history of humanity, but Peyton's curious mix of Nathan Drake one-liners, Isaac Clarke day-job ho-humming and his own brand of maniacal bearded grinning makes for a strangely likeable oddball. He's the best thing about *Lost Planet 3*, which isn't saying much. It is a rare treat to play as a guy who speaks like a normal person rather than a steroid-charred dullard, but it doesn't really matter when the game he's wandering about in is as staggeringly generic as anything we've seen this year.

The original *Lost Planet* was a happy mess; a misguided explosion of (then) amazing visuals, giant robots, grappling hooks and a hero called Wayne. For all its faults, it felt new and exciting. In turn, the sequel was a brave failure – a four player co-op with an almost *Monster Hunter*-esque bent. This, however, is bland emptiness, consisting primarily of icy corridors and shotguns, boss battles that repeat themselves every time the game gets bored and loading times so long you could grow a beard as fancy as Jim's (even if you're female).

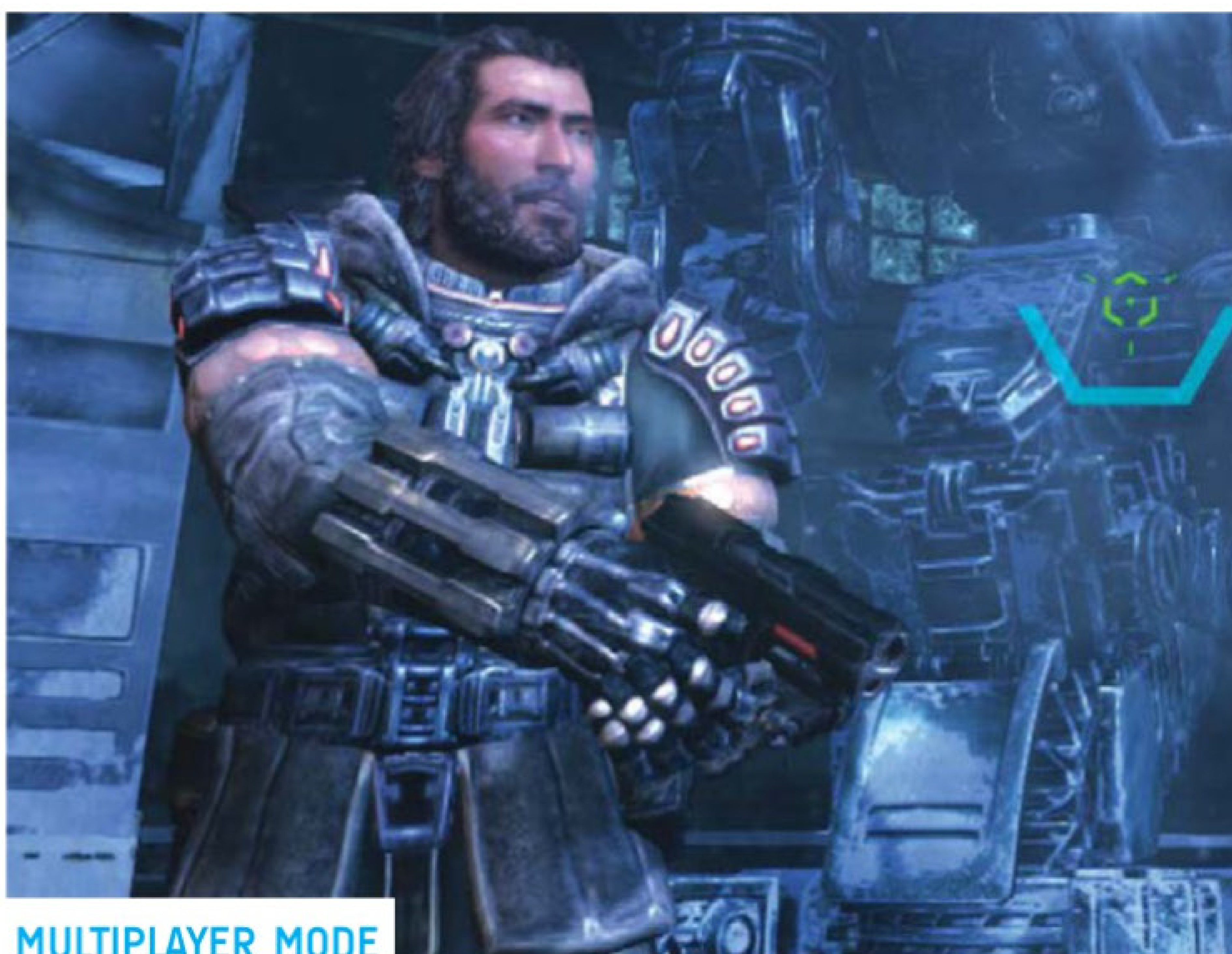
You see, Jim is ensconced on EDN III, working for NAVEC, a company that seeks out Thermal Energy (T-Eng) for shipment back to Earth. He's some sort of general dogsbody, and as such has to take his giant robot (known as Utility Rigs here, a name so boring that it's enough to send you to sleep just saying it) out into the snowy climes, and then shoot Akrid in their gnashing faces until he can find enough orange stuff to make everyone happy. There's nothing subtle here – the game simply jumps between slow, plodding Rig sections and fairly

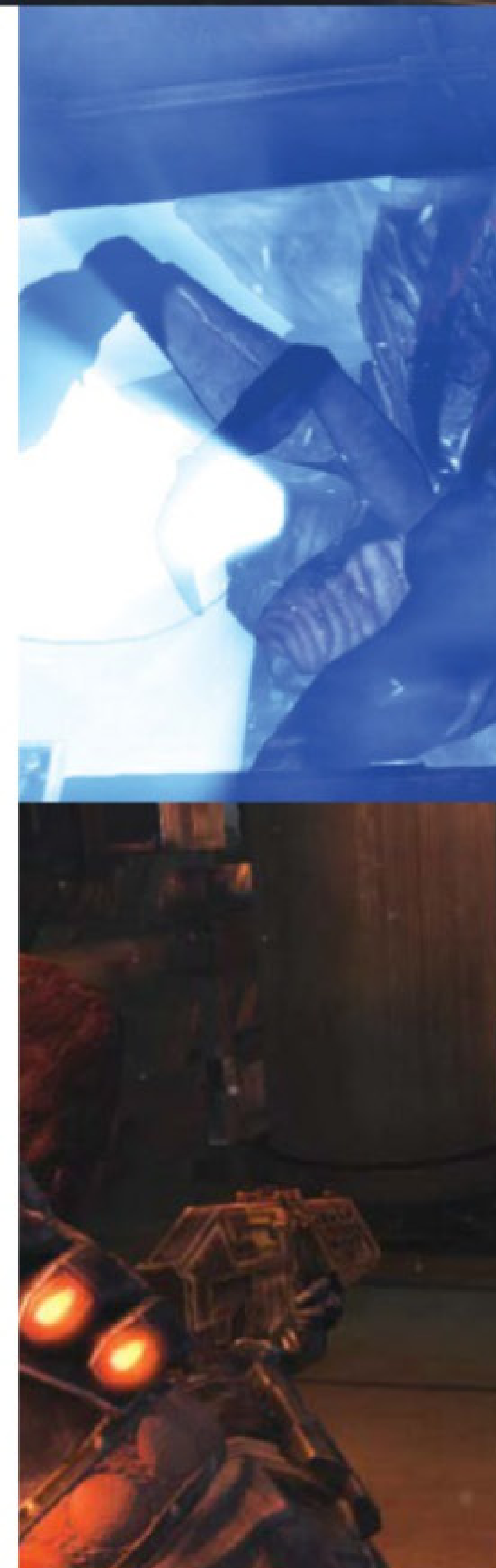
DETAILS

FORMAT: PlayStation 3
OTHER FORMATS: PC, Xbox 360
ORIGIN: USA
PUBLISHER: Capcom
DEVELOPER: Spark Unlimited
PRICE: £49.99
RELEASE: Out Now
PLAYERS: 1-10
ONLINE REVIEWED: Yes



Above: At a glance, the game looks nice enough, but the backgrounds are so static and uninvolved they almost feel like *Resident Evil*-style pre-rendered textures. There's none of the bright colours of the first two games. **Right:** For some reason, you can listen to a selection of tunes when you're walking about. You're never in it long enough for a song to finish, though.





MULTIPLAYER MODE

Many years ago, multiplayer *Lost Planet* was a big deal. Since then, we've had three *Battlefield* games, the entire *Modern Warfare* franchise, *Gears Of War* and its three sequels, and a little game called *Halo 4*. Still, Spark has tried its best to make *Lost Planet 3*'s mulitplayer mode as good as it can be. The structure is unsurprisingly familiar, and the now-rigid grappling hook means the free-flowing madness of the original has been replaced by something much more staid and typical. Still, the game's tight controls and punchy weapons make for a fun enough scrap, and the addition of the mechs (or Utility Rigs) lends it a decent bit of variety. No one's going to play it, though. Really.





snappy corridor blasts. You can dive in and out of your Rig at will, but none of the levels have big enough doors to let the thing in, so it's rendered pointless. Also, you take less damage outside of the Rig than in it. Yes, a bearded man that looks like the ghost of Jake Gyllenhaal is tougher than a 30-foot walking tank.

Lost Planet 3 is not a good game, then, but for all its startling lack of ambition, it does do the basics well enough. The shooting, of which there is plenty, is actually perfectly serviceable. It's completely lacking in panache, of course, but the guns are chunky and satisfying, the Akrid pop and burst into orange muck when killed, and the controls are fast and smooth. This has a dual-pronged effect. It almost removes frustration – always the bane of a middling game – so you can effectively hammer through it without ever firing a synapse. However, it also means that *Lost Planet 3* is very tedious, especially if you're particularly experienced in this genre (and if you've been playing consoles for this past generation, you probably are). The occasional boss battle does spice things up, but they don't even try to be interesting. There are giant orange glowy bits. Shoot them.

Weirdly, the only thing pulling you through this trudge is the story. It's astonishingly generic, almost to the point of parody, but the acting and dialogue are actually a cut above most C-grade noise. The narrative is so predictable that it feels like someone downloaded a template from the internet and just copied and pasted the game into it. So yes, every story beat is one you've seen before and every twist is predictable from a distance, but you at least know who you are, where you're going, why you're doing it and who the other people around you are when they're yapping in your ear.

Spark Unlimited isn't exactly renowned as a studio. Its previous efforts, *Turning Point* and *Legendary*, are both awful games. But they both have something in common – interesting hooks. The former is about what would happen to the world if Churchill had died, and the latter is about Pandora's Box opening in modern day. There are obviously people on the team who like a good yarn and have the chops to write one, but lack the confidence, scope or budget to really let loose. At least *Lost Planet 3* holds itself together far better than both of those games. It's straight-to-DVD, work-for-hire trash, but it really is hard to hate. And in Jim Peyton there's at least a character you can root for. He's a weirdo, has a horrible haircut and his beard is too long, but he does feel like a real person. Well, apart from his extraordinary calm in the face of thousands of deadly giant insects. But he chats, makes jokes, has opinions and generally feels more three-dimensional than most action-game dudes.

Back in the days of PS2, games like this made sense because they'd still make money. But in 2013, they no longer do. Games far better, with far more marketing and a far stronger pedigree don't make money. So *Lost Planet 3*'s mere existence? It's a mystery. And there's only one man who can solve it: Jim Peyton. Always bet on the beard.

FINGERPRINT

WHAT MAKES THIS GAME UNIQUE

GRIN AND BEARD IT: *Lost Planet 3*'s main character is a smiley maniac. He's far happier than he ever should be.

FAQs

Q. GOOD STORY?
Actually, it's not that bad. Absurdly generic, but written with gusto.

Q. IS IT LIKE THE OTHER GAMES?
Not at all. It's a completely typical third person shooter with no original ideas whatsoever.

Q. WHY DOES IT EXIST?
No one knows. *Lost Planet 3* isn't a terrible game, it's just a wholly unnecessary one.

YES, A BEARDED MAN THAT LOOKS LIKE THE GHOST OF JAKE GYLLENHAAL IS TOUGHER THAN A 30-FOOT WALKING TANK



Above: Controlling a mech is slow and boring. They plod along, barely able to defend themselves against enemy attacks, and within minutes you'll have to get out and walk anyway. A bizarre design choice. Left: Credit where it's due – the combat might be trite, but at least it's punchy. The shotgun has kickback and the hunting rifle feels powerful.

VERDICT 6/10
SERVICEABLE TEDIUM WITH AN EPIC BEARD

HERE WE GO AGAIN

FIFA 14

DETAILS

FORMAT: PS3
OTHER FORMATS: Xbox 360 (this version)
ORIGIN: Canada
PUBLISHER: EA
DEVELOPER: EA Sports
PRICE: £49.99
RELEASE: Out now
PLAYERS: 1-14
ONLINE REVIEWED: NO

With English football in its biggest flux in years thanks to the departure of Sir Alex Ferguson and a transfer window bordering on the ridiculous, it's fitting that the *FIFA* series find itself in a similar state of uncertainty. While this PS3 and X360 version of *FIFA 14* will be the most profitable for EA, everyone's looking to the next-gen debut to see just where digital football is heading in the next few years. Will it be the revolution that *FIFA 09* was in this generation? Or merely a graphical overhaul, trapped by the limitations of an engine that's starting to show its age?

Sadly, no one will know for a couple more months, and we all have to make do with that very same ageing engine. *FIFA 14* is probably the least revolutionary football game in some years – a near carbon copy of its predecessor that makes tiny adjustments in key areas, the likes of which many won't even notice.

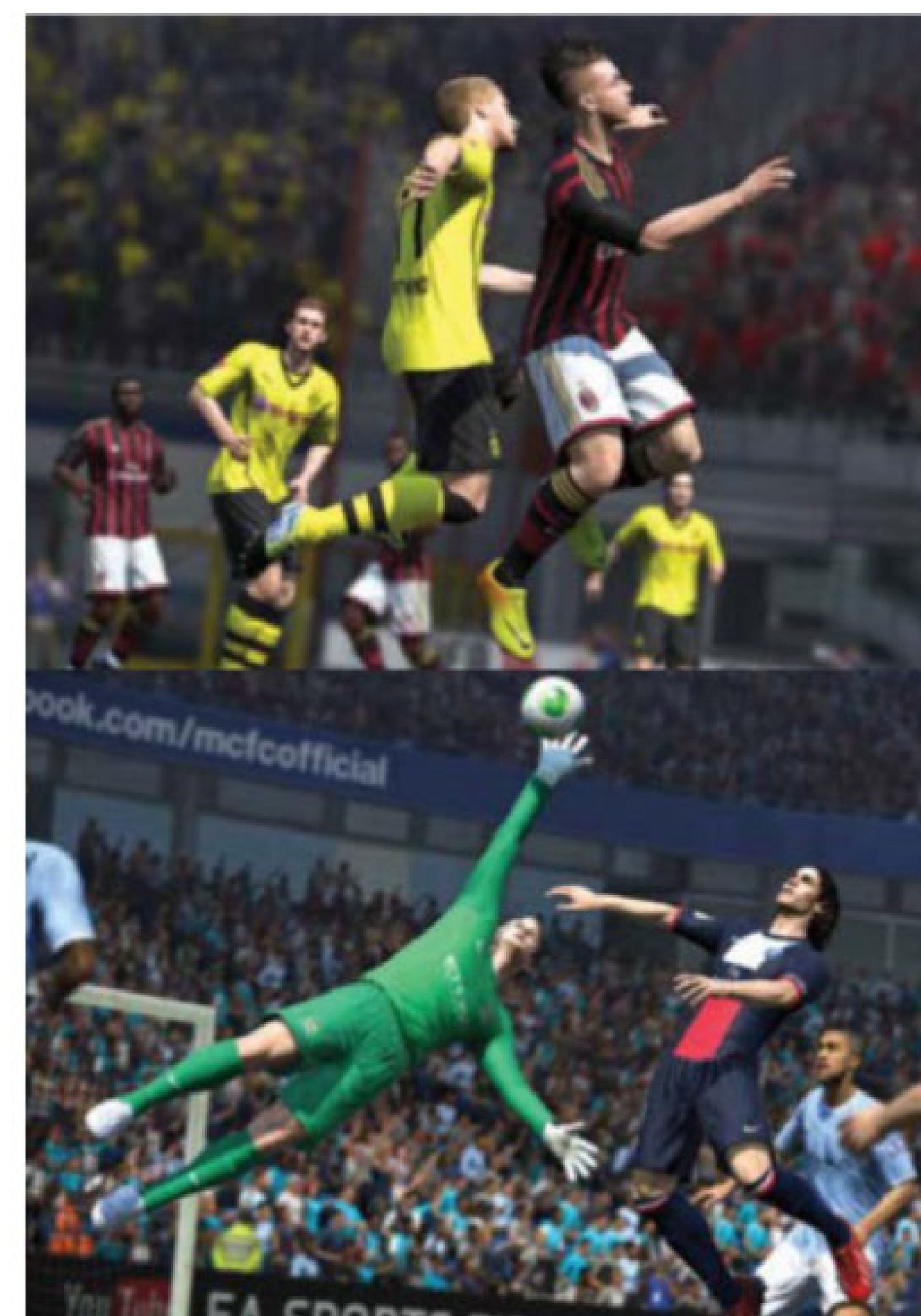
Just as a great manager needs only miniscule tweaks to turn goodness into greatness, so too does *FIFA 14* manage to fix most of *13*'s major issues by simply dialling up the detail. Every football game review usually rattles off a hitlist of what has changed (generally involving some arbitrary discussion of physicality between opposing players), but here there's almost nothing else to talk about. So here we go.

The major alteration, clearly, is shooting. It's been *FIFA*'s weakness for a while – a lack of variety in shooting animations and angles has led to the same goals being scored over and over again. It's not that players haven't been able to score great goals; it's that they've not been able to score many *different* great goals. There's only so many times you can enjoy a cut-back that's swept into the net by a striker with a planted foot or an angled drive into the top corner from 16 yards.

FIFA 14 reaches ever closer to *Pro Evolution Soccer*'s unusual magic by making more goals feel unique. That's 'more' – not 'every'. Now when you fire a cross into the box, your striker might attempt to attack the ball in a number of different ways, be it a lunging slide or measured side-foot. Yes, the awkward planted shot remains, but it means the same passing movement can still lead to different goals. These changes may sound small – and

Right: Gareth Bale will remain on the cover despite his transfer to Real Madrid for an incredible £86 million.

Below: Player likenesses are actually far better this year – at least for the players the team has bothered to recreate. The glaring-eyed zombies are now a thing of the past, and famous folk are recognisable both close-up and from a distance.



Below: EA's last transition to 'next-gen' was terrible, so here's hoping similar mistakes aren't made when the PS4 and Xbox One launch.

Below: The online modes will prove *FIFA 14*'s most fruitful – with co-op seasons joining the already wildly popular Ultimate Team and regular Online Seasons mode. As always, expect mild button lag to be an issue.



YOU CAN'T ESCAPE THE FEELING THAT THIS GAME HAS COME AS FAR AS IT POSSIBLY CAN ON THIS GENERATION OF HARDWARE



Above: It still hasn't quite captured the raw drama of a truly great goal, but *FIFA* is edging closer to *PES*. And it still outperforms Konami's effort in many other ways, notably in its rampaging counter attacks.



SACK RACE

The always-popular career mode has undergone some superficial changes, but still manages to ride the line between *Football Manager*-style depth and frivolous kickabout fairly well. The biggest change this year is the inclusion of scouts, which you can assign to various parts of the world to look for players. Further scouting reports let you see a potential target's full statistics. In some ways, it's just a couple of added barriers getting between you and a player (no one knows if Fabregas is a good player? Really), but there's a satisfying kind of pseudo-reality to it. Ultimately, though, the opposition AI is still not good enough to sustain a truly dramatic managerial career, but it's getting better.



they are – but they do make *FIFA 14* feel more organic and 'real' than before. Striking the ball is more natural and scoring more satisfying.

Having said that, you can't escape the feeling that this game has come as far as it possibly can on this generation of hardware. The animation system, once so crucial in *FIFA*'s dominant return to the summit of football gaming, now feels stiff and heavy. Despite claims to the contrary, it's still far too difficult to beat a man when dribbling, especially when playing against the heavy-pressing AI (which is more fun to battle than before, but still very defensive and laborious).

Often, it feels like you're playing with a team of good-intentioned robots who are well-programmed in the ways of football, but never quite understand exactly what's going on. They don't look in the right direction during play, and they stand still when the ball's in the net; they just don't feel quite right. For all its faults, *PES* has been light years ahead in this department for years, and it just feels like *FIFA* needs more horsepower to get its players looking and acting more naturalistic.

There's nothing significant to complain about, really. *FIFA 14* is still a tremendously enjoyable game, and when it flows is a captivating simulacrum of the world's most popular sport. It's especially good at recreating football in transition – the swift change between attack and defence. Watching a team like Real Madrid or even Manchester United counter attack is a joy, with players making intelligent runs and the space on the pitch conveniently removing the concerns that come from trying to navigate an otherwise sticky midfield.

Teams and players still lack individuality, too. While it's easy to distinguish between a lunking Rio Ferdinand and a spritely David Silva, there's very little between say, Gotze and Ozil or Nani and Valencia. Once again, this is an area where *PES* has a sizeable advantage, and is probably the most important aspect for *FIFA* to improve for next-gen.

These are not big enough problems to remotely disappoint the legions of *FIFA* fans who've grown accustomed to the way the game works, but how about what's happening in the many, many menus that drown the front end with their various interlocking boxes and layered options? Well, you certainly can't fault the wealth of choice. From an improved career (see The Sack Race) to 'the forgotten man' Be A Pro, *FIFA 14* has every possible angle covered.

Of course, it's the combination of Online Seasons and the behemoth that is Ultimate Team that will really light fires under the dedicated *FIFA* community, but with servers not up at the time of writing, it's impossible to judge how they've changed. The smart money is on 'not a lot' given their overwhelming popularity.

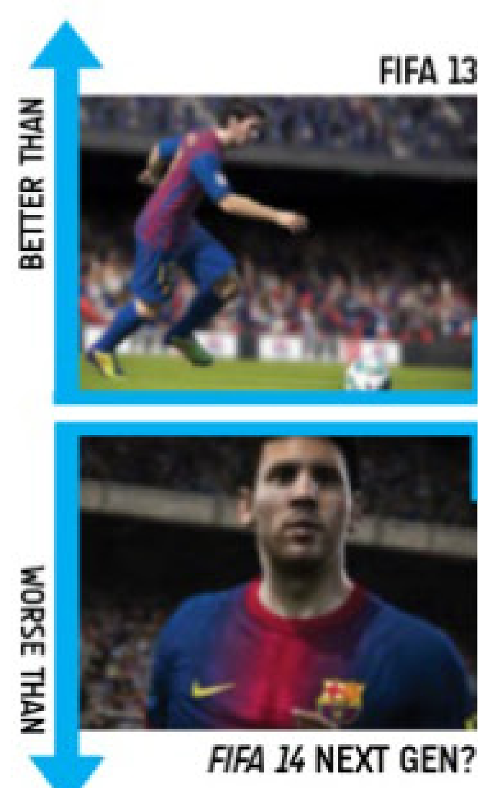
A curious year, then, for *FIFA*. Just as we can't know the intricacies of Ultimate Team until cards are bought and sides are picked, nor can we know the full impact of EA's beast until the next-gen version makes its mark, with the Ignite engine powering little Messi's legs all the way to victory. Until then, you'll have to put up with more of the same. We're sure 20-odd million of you won't mind.

FAQs

Q. BETTER THAN FIFA 13?
Yes, although it's barely noticeable. Shooting is improved, tackling is tighter and the likenesses are less zombified.

Q. ANY HILARIOUS PHYSICS BUGS?
Not yet, but there's always time…

Q. MESSI OR RONALDO?
If the front cover's anything to go by then it's the little Argentine.



FINGERPRINT
WHAT MAKES THIS GAME UNIQUE

LICENCE TO SHILL: EA has snapped up even more licences this year, denying Konami's *PES* the rights to certain Spanish stadia, as well as many European leagues.

VERDICT 8/10
MARGINALLY BETTER THAN EVER, BUT ROLL ON NEXT-GEN

Below: *PES* looks better than ever this year, with the rebooted physics system and new features like Combination Play making this the truest to life instalment in the series for some time. Even player likenesses have got better this year, in most cases.





DETAILS

FORMAT: PlayStation 3
OTHER FORMATS: Xbox 360/PC
ORIGIN: Japan
PUBLISHER: Konami
DEVELOPER: In-house
PRICE: £49.99
RELEASE: Out now
PLAYERS: 1-10
ONLINE REVIEWED: No

AS GOOD AS — PES 2013



WORSE THAN — FIFA 14

DOES KONAMI'S BOLD DECISION TO CHANGE ENGINE PAY OFF?

Pro Evolution Soccer 2014

The battle for football gaming supremacy has been raging for some years now, but ever since the late Noughties it has quite obviously been in favour of EA's efforts with *FIFA*.

But the whispers of late have been that Konami has got themselves organised again and the '*FIFA* or *PES*?' question might actually be a genuine conversation starter once again.

On very first impressions, however, you might not think this is the case. A lot has changed in *PES*, and that is apparent from the first whistle of that first game. Things have been designed to be more thoughtful; players want a touch before playing a pass, raw pace won't get you past a defender without questions. It takes some getting used to, especially if you're used to the more frantic pace of *FIFA* . Everything feels different, with the through ball system having been altered so now a target circle appears on-screen when you hit triangle, and you can quickly alter the angle of the pass you play. At first you'll utterly hate it, but over time it will draw an appreciative nod as you split the opposition's defence perfectly. In truth, the whole game works like this.

Then there's the shooting, where on occasions the ball seems to take on a floaty effect, hanging in the air for too long, as though suddenly half full of helium. It makes some strikes from both close range and distance look unnatural, and seems to come and go inexplicably. The reason for all this change from Konami's flagship sports title is the introduction of the Fox Engine, designed to take *Pro Evo* take to the levels it has been in the past. There are flashes of this system when you play; with the ball ping-ponging around more naturally than previous games, and pass and move feeling more crucial than ever up against tighter, better organised defences. Having said that some of the classic PES AI, or lack of it still exists. Those extra touches instead of clearing the ball that lead to an own goal, or free kicks given for perfect tackles. The reaction time still feels laggy too, with quick snap shots or turns having to be pre-empted by the player in order to look instinctive on-screen. In short, the game feels hugely improved in some areas, yet still lagging massively in others.

ENHANCED

IMPROVING ON LAST YEAR

COMBINATION PLAY: Create and build attacking moves to unleash on the opposition at the right time.
THE CROWD: For big games they get involved with huge displays, creating an atmosphere not before seen in *PES*.

Visually this is the best-looking *PES* yet, with fantastic crowd displays and better player likeness. *FIFA* fans will point to the woeful licensing and stadium comparisons, but you can get past it. Master League has been given a boost too with users now able to change clubs as a manager – closer to *FIFA*'s career mode. There's also the interesting tactical feature of Combination Play, where you can create attacking moves, much like setpieces, and then use then in-game when the trigger icon appears on-screen. Touches like this show revolutionary thinking from Konami, something the series has been desperately lacking up to this point.

PES 2014 has managed then to free itself from *FIFA*'s shadow, but it still needs a knockout punch if it wants to move EA from the spotlight. Not quite as well-rounded overall as last year.





VERDICT 6/10
CLOSING THE GAP ON *FIFA* QUICKER THAN EVER

PIGGY IN THE RIDDLE

Amnesia: A Machine For Pigs

As the pseudo-sequel to *Amnesia: The Dark Descent*, it's hard not to install *A Machine For Pigs* without some pre-emptive sense of the nightmarish creatures that'll soon be haunting your hard drive. After all, the non-combative nature of the nerve-wracking original has often been cited as one of the most harrowing games ever made and proof that survival horror is far from dead and buried. As it stands, though, *A Machine For Pigs* is less concerned with making your mouse hand freeze in fear after catching a glimpse of some unspeakable Lovecraftian terror and more with unravelling an unsettling story of regret and redemption.

While the first game was handled by the Swedish Frictional Games, *A Machine For Pigs* is the brainchild of The Chinese Room. This means that while both games are mechanically similar on a fundamental level, there's minimal overlap in terms of story. Indeed, the sequel is set at the turn of the 20th Century, 60 years after the original, and centres on a wealthy industrialist named Oswald Mandus. Mandus awakens in his London mansion after suffering a fevered dream about an infernal machine, and as he leaves his bed in search of his twin sons, the player must explore the Victorian setting with little more than a lamp for company.

As a piece of psychological trickery, the power of suggestion is something that will keep horror directors in work for many years to come. *A Machine For Pigs* uses this technique right from the get go as the player is confronted by one disturbing sight after another – be it a draw full of disembodied teeth or a ghostly after image. But while the first hour of gingerly opening doors and fighting the urge to play something less foreboding is fuelled by the horrific reputation of *The Dark Descent*, it gradually becomes apparent that this game just isn't as scary.

This could be attributed to the more streamlined gameplay. Instead of a sanity gauge that drains as you venture into the darkness or look directly at the creatures,

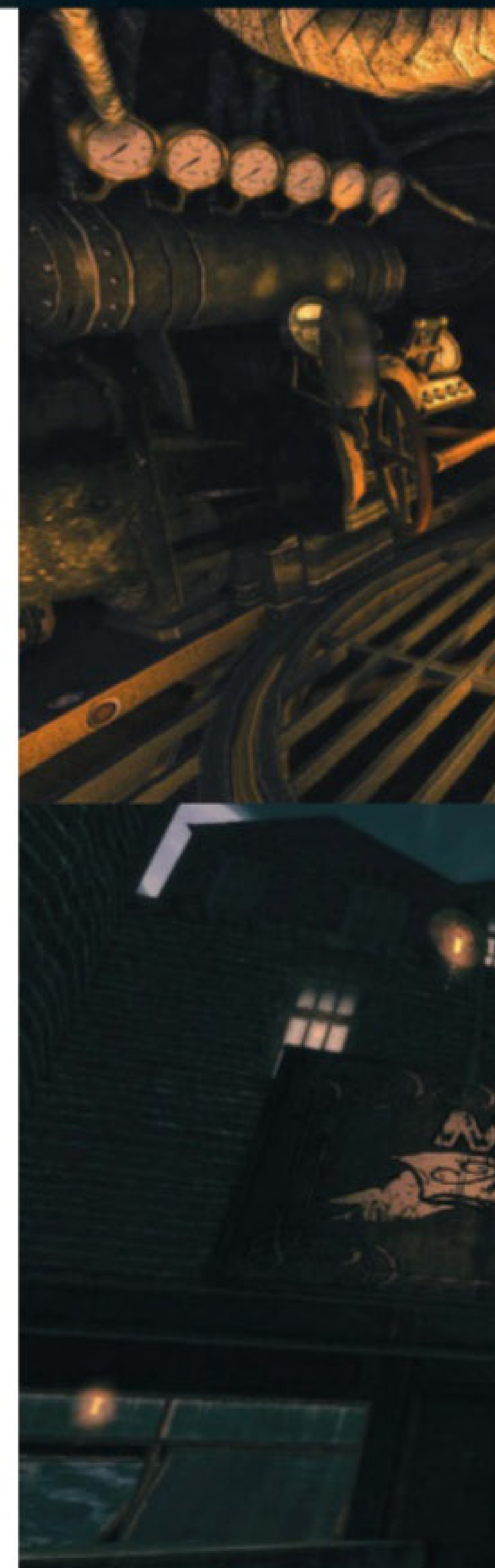
DETAILS

FORMAT: PC
OTHER FORMATS: TBC
ORIGIN: UK
PUBLISHER: The Chinese Room
DEVELOPER: Frictional Games
PRICE: £12.99
RELEASE: Out Now
PLAYERS: 1
MINIMUM SPEC: Windows Vista, High-range Intel Core i3 / AMD A6 CPU or equivalent, 2GB RAM, Mid-range NVIDIA GeForce 200 / AMD Radeon HD 5000, 5GB available space
ONLINE REVIEWED: N/A



Above: Another criticism we have is the lack of enemy variation. The title clearly suggests that the game is more taken aback with swine flu than mad cow disease or avian influenza, but a bit more diversity would've been welcome. Right: We were reminded of *Another World* during one brief button-based moment. Answers on the back of a postcard to the usual address.





I LOVE LAMP

During the early sections of the game you're repeatedly teased by antiquated hunting rifles that adorn the walls of the mansion. Every fibre of your body wants to grab said instrument, make with the gunpowder and do what you did to the *Duke Nukem* 3D pig cops back in 1996. But this being an *Amnesia* game, the only metallic object you can rely on is the lantern that Mandus acquires after an unsettling trip to the attic. It has a tendency to flicker when enemies are nearby and it lacks the power of a modern day flashlight but at least it doesn't need topping up with oil. Even so, you do need to holster it whenever a Pigman creeps close by.







WORSE THAN

GONE HOME



AS GOOD AS

AMNESIA: THE DARK DESCENT

you have a lamp, and you can sit in a pitch black room without fear of being consumed by madness. But while the game effectively cuts out a lot of the mechanical distractions so you can immerse yourself in its steam powered story, the lack of action pushes the experience towards the realms of "interactive novel" without fully committing to the plunge.

Throughout our seven-hour play-through, we came face-to-face with the game's squealing Pigmen on only a handful of occasions, and even when we were forced to snuff out the lantern so we could sneak by the patrolling porkers, it rarely felt like the odds were against us. Fans of the original will undoubtedly get a kick out of a returning favourite, but after you've had your first run-in with a Pigman, the overall fear factor is noticeably softened.

Strip away the atmosphere, story and stealth and what you're left with is a straightforward puzzle game. When you come across a water pump that's missing a few essential cogs it's a simple matter of finding the missing gears, and even if you find yourself scratching your head while pondering how to proceed, the journal entries that Mandus writes for each new area will make sure you're never far away from a solution. It's disappointing in the sense that the game does little to challenge the player from a lateral thinking or strategic standpoint, but then again, it offers a journey that's rich with intrigue.

There isn't much we can say about the story without giving too much of the game away but the team at The Chinese Room have succeeded in crafting a Victorian world, albeit a fleeting fragment, that teeters on the edge of great change. The internal conflict of Mandus is what drives the story forwards, and the lack of human interaction outside of a few disembodied phone calls and audio logs means you always feel isolated, but as you swap the decadent furnishings of the manor for the cold and mechanical constructs that lie beyond, the game elegantly leads you towards its surprisingly thought-provoking conclusion.

MISSING LINK

WHAT WE WOULD CHANGE

PORK GRIND: We appreciate that the game needs to be accessible but the addition of difficulty settings would've helped to make *A Machine For Pigs* less of a doddle.

FAQs

Q. BETTER THAN PENUMBRA?
It's more atmospheric than Frictional Games survival-horror classic. We miss the option to fight back.

Q. HOW SCARY IS IT?
It relies too much on a script to be truly terrifying but there are a few heartbeat-skip moments.

Q. DOES THE SHADOW RETURN?
That would be telling. You will encounter one enemy that looks like something you'd see in *Return To Castle Wolfenstein*.

THE LACK OF ACTION PUSHES THE EXPERIENCE TOWARDS THE REALMS OF "INTERACTIVE NOVEL" WITHOUT FULLY COMMITTING TO THE PLUNGE



Above: Environments tell their own story in impressive fashion. It's all in the details. Left: In addition to the starting mansion and subterranean depths, the game features a few outdoor areas. They give the game a more even grounding that offsets the madness that's trying to consume Mandus and the surrounding world.

It's not going to challenge *BioShock Infinite* or *The Last of Us*, and the less said about the average voice acting and workmanlike graphics the better, but the writing and level design supersede the odd hammed line and modest polygon count by painting a world that's as mysterious as it is sinister. And while a part of us yearns for the sense of dread that *The Dark Descent*'s Gatherers instilled with the slightest glance, this game's horror has a more profound message behind it.

To recommend *A Machine For Pigs* depends therefore on your gaming tastes. If you like to overcome a solid challenge then you may find the softcore difficulty too tame for your liking, but if you play games because you appreciate the unique style of storytelling that they can offer, then *A Machine For Pigs* offers an experience that's somewhere between the original *Amnesia* and The Chinese Room's previous work on *Dear Esther*. It doesn't strike a perfect balance between engaging gameplay and a compelling story but for a pig's tale it's still satisfyingly twisted.

VERDICT 7/10
A BIT OF RUMP AND BUMP IN THE NIGHT

FIGHT A WAR WITHOUT END, WHICH ALSO STRUGGLES A BIT GETTING STARTED

Arma III

There are two very different ways to look at *Arma III*. The first is with shock, opening it up and realising that it's a military shooter with almost no content: its single-player campaign yet to be added, and only a few basic 'showcase' missions on offer that are more tutorial than game. Stepping onto one of its islands is like wandering around the set of a war film that hasn't started actually shooting yet, in a way that's unfortunate at best and infuriating at worst.

This is a completely fair assessment. Crucially though, it's just as fair to see *Arma III* in a far more positive light – as building blocks for the ultimate military sandbox. Bohemia may have yet to serve up many guided missions, true, but it has provided two gigantic, gorgeously designed islands and the military shooting systems to be the ultimate modern warfare sandbox, as well as an editor advanced enough that someone who by their own admission was 'just titting around' can throw together a scenario that gives players superpowers. Right now yes, the lack of official content *is* disappointing. Given though that the only thing likely to stop *Arma III* improving dramatically over the next few months is the outbreak of a flesh-eating virus that exclusively targets shooter fans, things could be much worse.

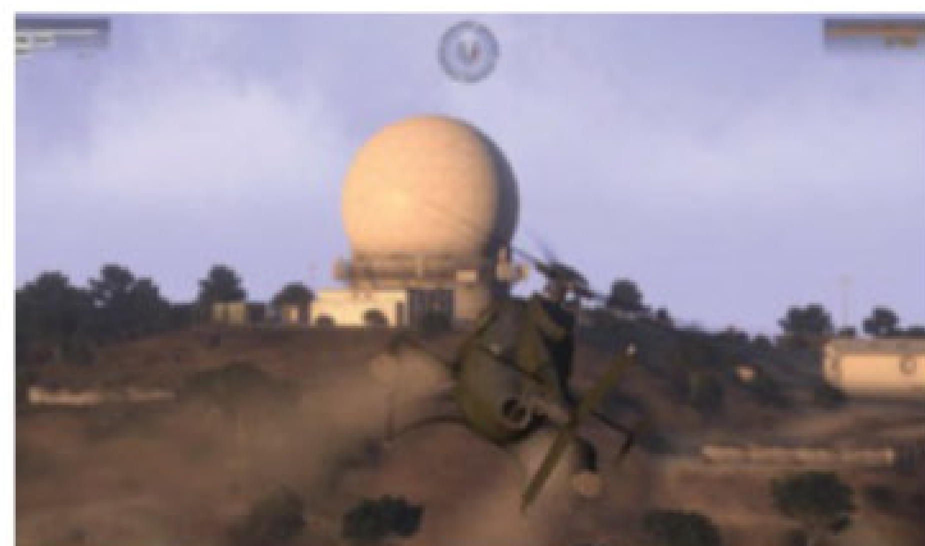
DETAILS

FORMAT: PC
ORIGIN: Czech Republic
PUBLISHER: Bohemia Interactive
DEVELOPER: In-house
PRICE: £39.99
RELEASE: Out now
PLAYERS: 1 - server max
MINIMUM SPEC: Core i5, 4GB RAM, 1GB 3D card
ONLINE REVIEWED: Yes

Below: The AI is… let's just say it's lucky that most of the time it's pinging at you from a distance. Up close it has a tendency to screw up, and your own team aren't the sharpest knives in the sock drawer either.



What moves this from mere optimism to a confident near-certainty is exploring the content that players have already made. *Arma III* hooks directly into the Steam Workshop, complete with its ratings and collections system for easy curation, and new scenarios installed from inside the game with a single click. Many are basic 'Go here, shoot guys' missions, others simply firing ranges or a quick way to jump into a tank or a helicopter. Some are ports of classic *Arma* and *Operation Flashpoint* missions. A few are simply strange, like the aforementioned superpowers that let you fly around like a clumsy Superman and knock down buildings with psychic blasts, and a concrete maze based on *Wolfenstein 3D*. Whatever your poison though, there's easily enough player-made content to fill Bohemia's content gap, thanks to an extremely long alpha/beta cycle and tools that give creators deep access to the game and its systems rather than just grudgingly letting them plonk down a few helicopters for a race.

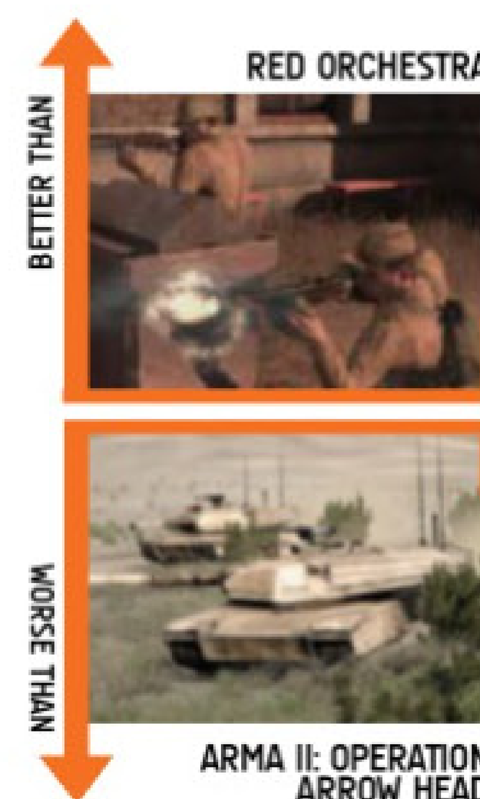


THE OFFICIAL NARRATIVE CAMPAIGN WILL LAST A FEW HOURS, BUT ARMA III SHOULD LAST YEARS

The best of the current content is already driving whole tank regiments through reasonable expectation. To pick one, Dynamic Universal War System. This compensates for the lack of an official campaign by procedurally generating as many as you like, complete with persistent stats, random bases, unlockable abilities, generated side missions, the ability to summon units and vehicles and mortar strikes with command points, an escalating conflict that goes from just you ambling around to armies clashing, and more. It also works in multiplayer. Once again, because it bears repeating, this is a scenario that you can play right now; one with multiple competitors working on the same concept, and the game only just out. The official narrative campaign will last a few hours, but *Arma III* should last years.

BETTER THAN: RED ORCHESTRA

WORSE THAN: ARMA II: OPERATION ARROW HEAD



When we remove this potential from the equation and just look at what's in the box now however, *Arma III* isn't a desperately exciting sequel. It's a decent one, looking great and with upgrades to key areas like physics that help it feel smoother and more satisfying. After *Arma II* though, it's distinctly short on content (in fairness, that game had years to gather it) and some of its bigger additions feel like time strangely spent. Scuba diving is in, for example, for the exceedingly rare times it's likely to be needed. Complaints about elements like the clunky command interface have been ignored



PORT IN A STORM

While *Arma III* doesn't ship with an official campaign, one is on its way – shipping as three free DLC episodes, starting in October, and featuring a narrative driven conflict between NATO and an Eastern coalition. Missions will factor in all of its systems, as well as offering increasing scope for command and playing with the big toys. Why is it not available at launch? Bohemia is open about that – it's simply not ready yet. It comes down to having retooled the originally intended game, Bohemia supporting the public beta over the last few months, and a couple of deeply unlucky disasters like having staffers jailed for "spying" while exploring Lemnos on either holiday/a reference gathering trip. If the campaign ends *Monty Python* style, with the Greek police sweeping in to arrest all combatants, that'll be why.

FAQs

Q. WHAT OFFICIAL CONTENT IS AVAILABLE AT LAUNCH?
Two islands, hosting twelve 'showcases' of game systems, three 'meet the faction' showcases, ten firing drills, and nine multiplayer scenarios.

Q. HOW MANY PLAYERS CAN JOIN A SERVER?
That depends. *Arma III* doesn't have a hard limit, so the numbers are a combination of what the scenario being played and the server can both handle. At launch, most were topping out at 64 players.

Q. CAN I RUN MY OWN UBER-SERVERS?
If you have the power, absolutely. Regular servers – 'listen' servers – are created in the game itself. There's also a dedicated server program that requires more technical expertise, but gives better performance.



Left: Unless you're taking screenshots, having an out of body experience with the third-person camera isn't recommended.

Above: Fans have complained about the lack of a few vehicles, notably jets. The infantry, tank, 'copter and car action is solid though, allowing for easy travel but still making the map feel huge.

though, the AI continues to be a sharpshooting idiot savant, capable of hitting a player from a mile away but struggling to make it across an empty field, and the frame-rate is flaky whether things are busy or not.

Altis, the larger of *Arma III*'s two maps, is definitely one of its successes. It's a huge Mediterranean island, claimed to be 270km squared and if the campaign turned out to be the story of some soldiers conquering it purely to turn it into their personal military playpark, it would not be a surprise. There's little ambient life, with empty buildings suggesting that the island's primary export was everything inside them, but it's not like *Arma III* is trying to be *Skyrim*. What matters is that it's great for mission designers to play with, ranging from towns and forests and open planes that have been carefully placed to feel like a real place – as you'd hope, since it's based on Lemnos. Its sister island, Stratis, clocks in at 20km squared, offering an equally good but very different vibe with its heavy forests and rustic roads. Both have many fantastic campaigns ahead of them; scripted, modded, multiplayer and hopefully official.

With so much of *Arma III* laying the ground for its future, however, it's tricky to score it in the here and now – especially given that while the campaign wasn't available at the time of writing, it'll be out or imminent as you read this. Even if it was in place and superb though, this is a sandbox first, and that's what you should base your buying decision on – both on the possibilities and action *Arma III* offers now, and that for everything it adds to the series, it's going to be a while before we really see if it can leave its predecessor's shadow and fully earn its title's third stripe.

ENHANCED
IMPROVING ON THE ORIGINAL

STEAM WORKSHOP: Adding new scenarios couldn't be easier, and it keeps them updated too.
PHYSX: A realistic battlefield needs realistic physics. Now it's got them.

VERDICT 7/10
A SOMEWHAT PREMATURE START TO AN ENTERTAINING WAR



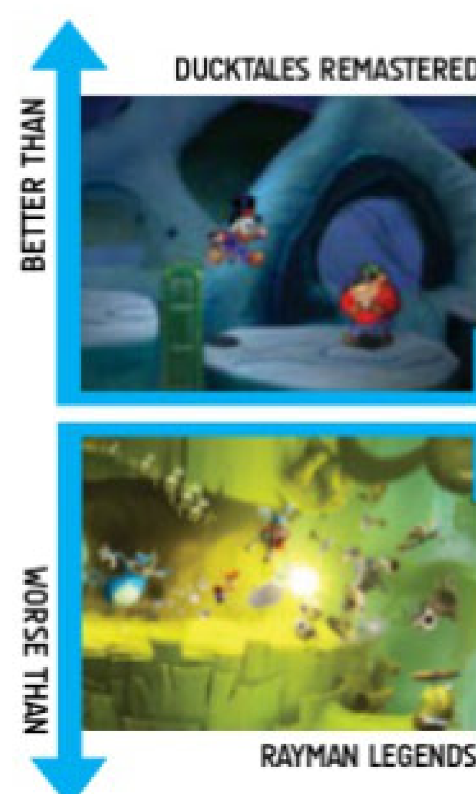
Above: It's one thing not to see the bullet that kills you. Here, you're lucky if you even see the shooter.

THE SHOW MUST GO ON, AND AT TIMES IT CERTAINLY DOES

Puppeteer

DETAILS

FORMAT: PlayStation 3
ORIGIN: Japan
PUBLISHER: Sony
DEVELOPER: SCE Japan Studio
PRICE: £24.99
RELEASE: Out now
PLAYERS: 1-2 (local)
ONLINE REVIEWED: N/A



It's easy to admire the craft of *Puppeteer*; indeed, the game positively invites you to do just that. Its world is a stage, its level furniture forcefully rumbling, rolling and slamming into place, offering sporadic glimpses of its intricate inner workings. Everything is handmade, and how beautifully constructed it is, too. That homespun aesthetic could so easily have made this a *LittleBigPlanet*, but if anything it's an even more attractive look: distinctive, gorgeously lit and animated – and ably supported by a stirring, restless score with a strong ear for the theatrical. It's a supremely confident piece of production design, in service to a game that struggles to live up to the sterling work of its artists.

At heart, it's a platformer, though it's one that has a little point-and-click in its veins. The left stick is used to guide sentient marionette Kutaro, the right to investigate suspicious background objects with his flying ally, Pikarina. Mostly, your searches will rattle the scenery, prompting a cute animation, and releasing a cascade of gems for our hero to collect. Occasionally you'll unveil a new noggin for the headless hero. These represent Kutaro's lives: if you're hit, you've got a limited time to collect the bouncing bonce before it vanishes, and if you lose all three it's back to the last checkpoint with you.

The heads are many and varied, but functionally identical. A background prompt will alert you to the one you need – some secrets can only be revealed on a return visit as you won't yet have collected the required head – and at this point, you press a button, Kutaro performs an adorable little jig, and the secret is revealed. The neat visual gags make the effort of finding the right head worth it, but there's no real joy in solving a puzzle that simply presents you with the answer. The scissors that act both as Kutaro's weapon and his main means of exploration are a more successful idea, albeit one with a few problems of its own. At times the cutting mechanic feels imprecise: it can be unclear whether an airborne snip will reach the next piece of fabric or floating paper, or send you plummeting earthward. And while the platforming distinguishes itself from *LittleBigPlanet* with its weight and solidity, it's not above the occasional cheap tactic.

That lack of consistency is sadly pervasive. The jump prompts during on-rails sequences, the tutorials for every new move, the comically simple QTE finishers and the repetition of tasks suggest this is a game for younger players. The bawdy humour and loquacious dialogue say otherwise. *Puppeteer*'s many moments of aesthetic splendour are easily enough to sweep you along to the finish, but when the curtain falls your applause will be for the set dressing and little else.

FINGERPRINT

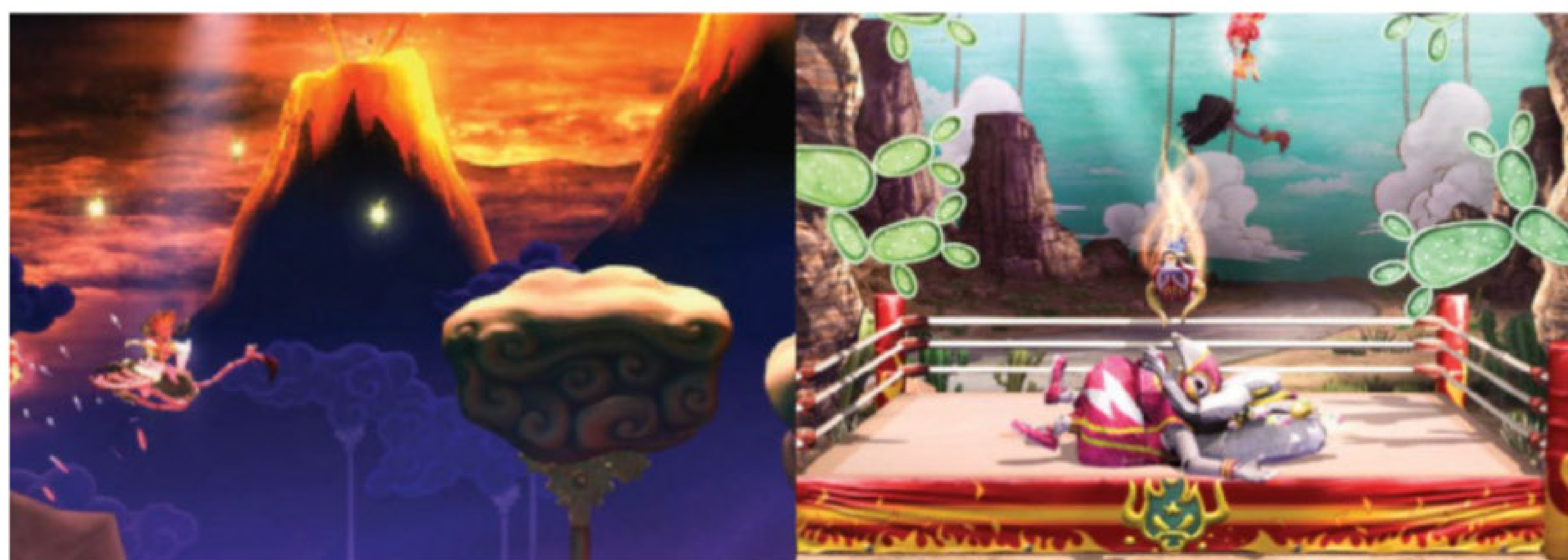
WHAT MAKES THIS GAME UNIQUE

CUTTING CREW: The scissors provide moments of real ingenuity.
MOVE IT: A second player can guide Pikarina independently with the Move controller, which is essential for triggering some secrets.



Above: The script is self-indulgent at times, and attempts at humour fall flat. It's a little sloppy, too: Kutaro wanders into a desert region, the narrator claims that night never falls there. Seconds later, a brief set change contradicts that.





Above: You'll have to demonstrate you're capable of using all the moves/items provided, though every place they're required is clearly signposted.

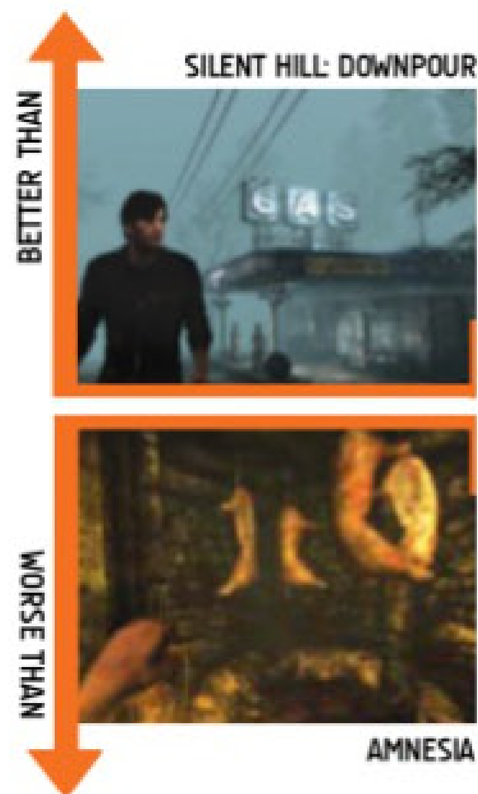
VERDICT 6/10
INVENTIVE AND STRIKING, BUT DISAPPOINTINGLY UNEVEN

LOOK OUT BEHIND YOU

Outlast

DETAILS

FORMAT: PC
OTHER FORMATS: PlayStation 4
ORIGIN: Canada
PUBLISHER: Red Barrels
DEVELOPER: In-house
PRICE: £14.99
RELEASE: Out now
PLAYERS: 1
MINIMUM SPEC: 2.2 GHz Dual Core CPU, 2GB RAM, 512 MB GPU, 5GB Hard Disk space
ONLINE REVIEWED: No



Horror is a poorly represented genre in videogames these days, but while behemoth fear-inducers like *Resident Evil* slip ever more into the realms of action, a new breed of horror games have been rising on the PC. In part this is thanks to the rise of indie games, and it helps that this is a genre that doesn't rely too heavily on the budget and polish of a triple-A title. This generation looks to *Amnesia* and not *Resident Evil*, and *Slender* rather than *Silent Hill* for its thrills. In that sense, *Outlast* doesn't have much competition and, as a result, little in the way of comparison. *Outlast*'s originality comes in two key elements: there are no weapons, and you'll need to utilise your camcorder to see through the numerous darkened halls.

The former isn't an unusual trait, with *Amnesia* the most recent comparison. What this means is *Outlast* is more familiar with fleeing from fear rather than fighting it. There are myriad asylum inmates to encounter, but the result is always the same: hiding in cupboards or crawling under beds with only your heavy breathing and beating heart for company. As a result, *Outlast* maintains its atmosphere brilliantly, keeping that balance between careful and apprehensive exploration.

This is expertly managed by the camcorder, the only means through which you can see in the dark. Fans of horror film *[REC]* will instantly recognise the effect, and it's a handy tool to hit that uncomfortable pang in the pit of your stomach. The asylum's numerous victims throughout the game pop thanks to this visual filter, and conveniently means you'll need to focus that little bit more.

Fear is something *Outlast* does well, and for a first effort from developer Red Barrels it's to be commended. That's not to say there aren't issues. Once the five or so hours of gameplay is done, there's little replayability, limiting the appeal of the game. And though the camcorder feature adds a unique form of fear – one that, as mentioned, is considerably effective – it's hard to deny that the stacks of batteries that litter the asylum bring with them two new issues. Firstly, it means that flashing battery warning on the camcorder rarely provides the sense of dread it's perhaps intending. Secondly, it drags you out of the game's otherwise impeccable immersion, leaving you exploring for batteries and questioning just *why* there are so many double-As littering an asylum.

None of this really impacts on what *Outlast* does well, however, and genre fans ought to get their hands on a copy as soon as possible. It won't ever be a classic, but *Outlast* does enough to be an important inclusion in your collection all the same.

FINGERPRINT

WHAT MAKES THIS GAME UNIQUE

FOUND FOOTAGE: It's a feature common of a lot of horror films these days, but rarely features in videogames. *Outlast*'s 'found footage' style of horror is nothing if not effective.



Above: Often eschewing the 'what you can't see scares you more' truism, *Outlast* combines psychological thrills with more visceral depictions of twists on horrific scenes.





Above: The grainy camcorder footage works well due to its ability to accentuate the carefully crafted environments, lighting and corpses.

VERDICT 8/10

SCARY FOR THE RIGHT REASONS, LIMITED FOR THE WRONG ONES

Below: The visuals are about as sharp as *Dawn Of War*, really. Simple enough so pretty much everyone can enjoy lag-free multiplayer sessions. And it's not an ugly game either – there's still plenty of personality and colour.





IN DEEP SPACE, NOBODY CARES IF YOU'RE A RAGING XENOPHOBE

Space Hulk

Unfair as it might sound, *Space Hulk*'s greatest strength and biggest weakness are exactly the same: that it's a faithful recreation of Games Workshop's original board game. Deep within the *Warhammer 40,000* universe, two powerful sides square off on board the crumbling Sin of Damnation. On one side – 'goodies' by a technicality – a small squad of Space Marines in power armour. Against them, a seemingly endless swam of Genestealers (who are totally not Aliens – ahem) with the power to emerge from anywhere and cut through their armour like butter. Both sides take turns fighting with tooth and claw and bolter and flames… but mostly by rolling invisible dice.

The Space Marine combat couldn't be much clumsier, which admittedly is entirely intentional. They are so big and the areas so small that they often get stuck when moving single file, with their hulking suits so heavy that it takes a whole action point simply to turn 90 degrees. These action points are the bread and butter of the turn-based action, with each marine getting four to play with, backed up by a random allocation of shared points each turn. It takes two points to put a marine into overwatch, and one to move a single space. They're a precious commodity, leaving no room for error.

The catch is that in the original game, there's a tactility and at least illusion of control to that system, while here the luck – or lack of it – in the dice feels arbitrary, not helped by misses happening in tight corridors where even a Stormtrooper would be expected to hit its motionless target. It also only takes a couple of missions to realise that there's only really one valid tactic most of the time: inch forwards slowly and save points to guard the flanks and un-jam weapons. There are regular moments of desperation and tough calls, but the design still feels more constricted than the corridors – not least because neither side is over-burdened with units and options at any point.

The real benefit of the PC version is the ability to see the battles played out via both cut-aways during combat, and the omnipresent FPS view in the corner. Even so, the appeal of the single-player campaign fades long before the end of even its 12 missions, with the sluggish pace crying out for ways to skip animations or otherwise speed things up a bit, or any reason to care about the generic troops under your command; they're just guns on legs.

Space Hulk does a solid job of turning the board game into a PC game, but in doing so wastes the PC's power to do more interesting things than cardboard can. In a world with games like *Frozen Synapse* and *XCOM: Enemy Unknown*, it's hard to recommend something so limited unless you're already sure you want it.

DETAILS

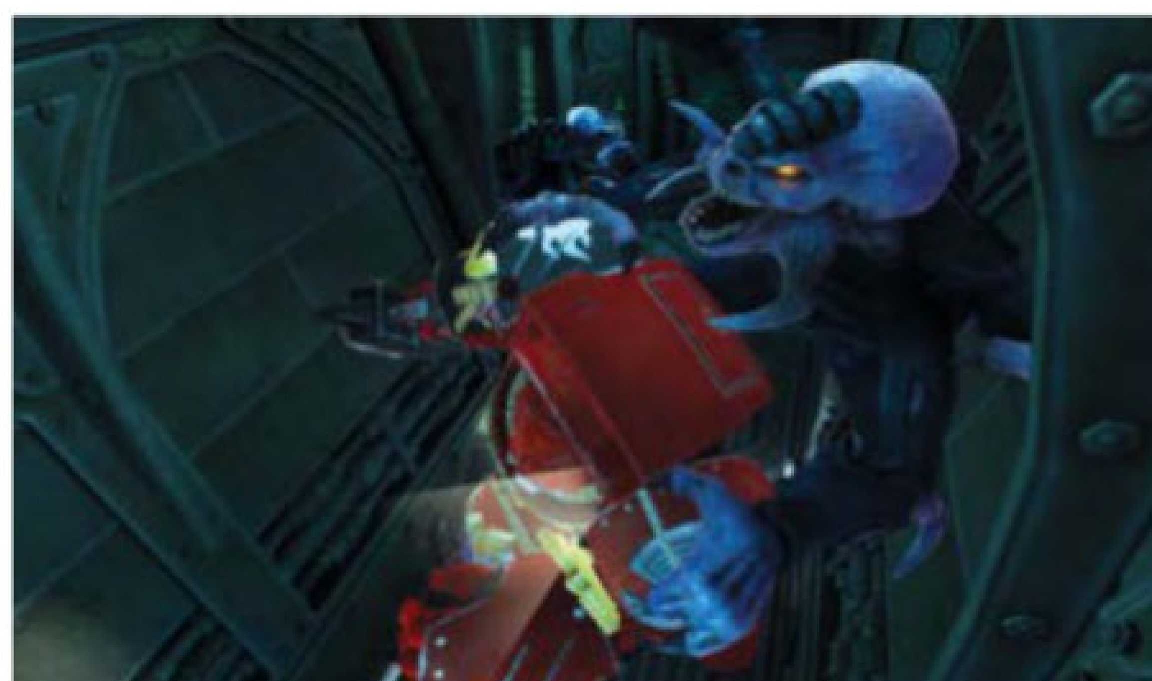
FORMAT: PC
OTHER FORMATS: Mac
ORIGIN: Denmark
PUBLISHER: Full Controll ApS
DEVELOPER: In-house
PRICE: £22.99
RELEASE: Out Now
PLAYERS: 2
MINIMUM SPEC: 2Ghz, 2GB RAM, 2GB HD, 512MB 3D
ONLINE REVIEWED: Yes



WORLDWIDE
TAKING GAMING ONLINE

MULTIPLAYER SPACE: *Space Hulk* offers hotseat and multiplayer (live and asynchronous) modes, with co-op planned. For now, it's a straightforward versus game on maps unlocked in the main campaign.





VERDICT 5/10
A DECENT CONVERSION, BUT TOO LIMITED TO BE MORE





Left: Donald Duck is a magic specialist while Goofy makes more of a defensive play. During moments with guest characters, Goofy will always be switched out.

Right: Back in the days where Square Enix was far too choosy about which games got a release here, *ReChain Of Memories* was overlooked.





SEPHIROTH AND MICKEY MOUSE IN THE SAME GAME. THAT HAPPENED

Kingdom Hearts HD 1.5 ReMix

Square Enix's Disney mash-up is too easily misunderstood by those who may not have been young enough to appreciate the wonder of visiting a multitude of worlds from various classic House of Mouse movies, or appreciate the idiosyncrasies of travelling between worlds on what is basically a rocket-armed Lego spaceship. *Kingdom Hearts* is fan service, but it's a credible oddity that has deservedly found a far greater audience today than it did when it limped onto UK shelves in 2002.

This HD compilation of the first title and previously unreleased (in the UK) PS2 spin-off remake *ReChain Of Memories* is a worthy collection for one of gaming's pleasing successes, even if some parts are slightly creakier by today's standards. A quick note, though – while it may appear that the DS title *358/2 Days* is part of this collection, it's actually just the nonsensical and tedious cutscenes stitched together with a nice title sequence. There's no gameplay here.

The original *Kingdom Hearts*, then, not burdened by the encroaching and thoroughly unwelcome bullshit mythology of subsequent titles, is absolutely in the spirit of the movies it adapts. It is a simple morality tale of light vs dark, realised through Tetsuya Nomura's Golden Age *Final Fantasy* lens. Following a sedate opening, *Kingdom Hearts* becomes a whirlwind tour of Disney-themed worlds, with *Aladdin*, *The Little Mermaid* and *Tarzan* being the best ones. Levels are rarely big, instead operating like little interconnected hubs that tick the major audiovisual boxes relevant to each movie. In some cases, protagonist Sora is given powers that match his surroundings – swimming or flying, in the case of Atlantica and Neverland.

While the camera is dodgy during more populated combat encounters, *Kingdom Hearts* is actually the perfect elementary action RPG, with a slight but easy-to-grasp progression system and a simple real-time translation of *Final Fantasy*'s staple moveset. A character from almost every world can be swapped with Donald Duck and Goofy in the party, like Peter Pan, Beast or Jack Skellington, and the presence of many original Disney voice actors and Haley Joel Osment as Sora gives it a vital bit of Hollywood prestige.

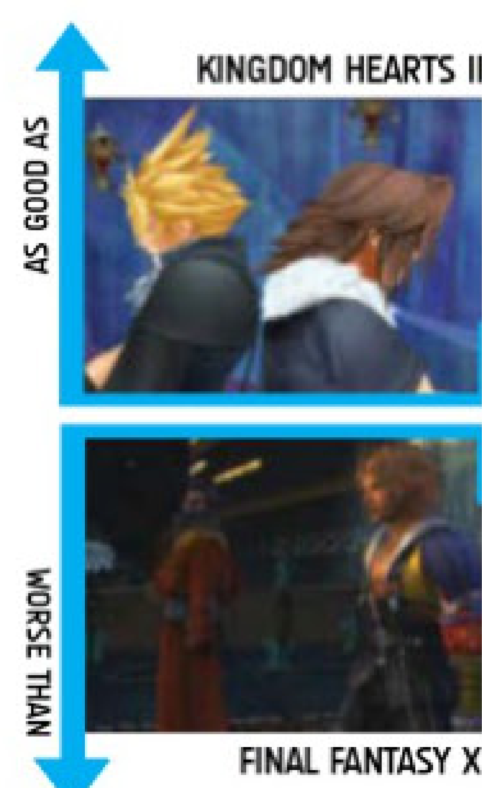
Kingdom Hearts: ReChain Of Memories, on the other hand, is a slack spin-off. This late-in-the-cycle PS2 adaptation of the Game Boy Advance game *Chain Of Memories* extracts one of the series' main draws, its combat, and instead turns *Kingdom Hearts* into a boring card game with no complexity, while environments from the original game are endlessly recycled.

It's a nice curio to have on the disk, we suppose, but any fans picking up *Kingdom Hearts 1.5* will almost certainly be after a high-end version of the original rather than this frivolous extra. As Square Enix takes what will probably be a decade to release *Kingdom Hearts III*, this expensive-feeling re-release and a matching *2.5* for the sequel will be a more than adequate stopgap.

DETAILS

FORMAT: PlayStation 3
ORIGIN: Japan
PUBLISHER: Square Enix
DEVELOPER: In-house
PRICE: £24.99
RELEASE: Out now
PLAYERS: 1
ONLINE REVIEWED: N/A

AS GOOD AS: KINGDOM HEARTS II



WORSE THAN: FINAL FANTASY X

MISSING LINK

WHAT WE WOULD CHANGE

ORIGINAL SOUNDTRACK: Something is a bit off about the score in *Kingdom Hearts 1.5* – it sounds different. An original, unremastered option would have been welcome.

VERDICT 7/10

TREASURE THE ORIGINAL, FORGO THE SPIN-OFFS

INTO DARKNESS

Lone Survivor: Director's Cut

That Sony has gotten behind a title as unusual and interesting as *Lone Survivor* shows the extent to which the PS Vita has reinvented itself over the past year. From hobbyist PSP successor with the intention of putting huge-scale console titles on a handheld to a post-PC release hub for indie titles, this device has proven to be a great match for such games.

What audiences get with *Lone Survivor*, first released on PC last year, is a horror adventure in the atmospheric vein of *Silent Hill*. Even the music, Jasper Byrne's specialty, having contributed to the *Hotline Miami* soundtrack with a background in music production, kicks off with a Yamaoka-like catchy opener that sounds in line with the *Theme Of Laura* from *SH2*. Another obvious sound influence is Angelo Badalamenti, an extension of some obvious Lynchian vibes within the storytelling, too, applying a constant disconcerting drone to the background that is reminiscent of the composer's *Twin Peaks* work.

Lone Survivor is a 2D hybrid between point-and-click and survival horror. Players navigate darkened corridors in a fashion that requires you to remember small details within it, and retracing your steps can often be challenging, even with a mirror system that lets you warp back-and-forth throughout environments.

DETAILS

FORMAT: PS Vita
OTHER FORMATS: PlayStation 3
ORIGIN: England
PUBLISHER: Curve Studios
DEVELOPER: Curve Studios/ Superflat Games
PRICE: £9.99
RELEASE: Out Now
PLAYERS: 1
ONLINE REVIEWED: N/A



Below: The majority of scares come in sound, rather than visual design.



Sanity plays a big part of your progression in *Lone Survivor*. You're required to sleep and eat often, as well as carry a necessary number of batteries for your torch to get through the dark without succumbing to fear. To keep your supplies in check, you can take pills before sleeping, and wake up with fresh ammo and batteries in your inventory – but the pills cause strange dreams, and without going too much into it, there may be consequences for continued use. Fairly disgusting-looking if not terribly scary enemies populate the environments, too, and like *Silent Hill*'s narrative, there's a kind of surrealism that you uncover over the course of the game.

It's story-driven, but strongly mechanical, and will be ideal for anyone concerned that big publishers have left survival horror behind. *Lone Survivor* is an intriguing cornerstone of this new generation of indie horror titles. If you've played the PC version before, there are two primary reasons why you should own this title on Vita, too. The first is content-based, with extra endings and new game plus content to incentivise additional playthroughs. The other is the Vita itself, and how well the pixelated art style and superb lighting effects suit that wonderful screen. There's really nothing else like this on Sony's handheld right now, and *Lone Survivor* will hopefully find an audience as the right game at the right time – an unusual, distinctive and memorable treat.

ENHANCED

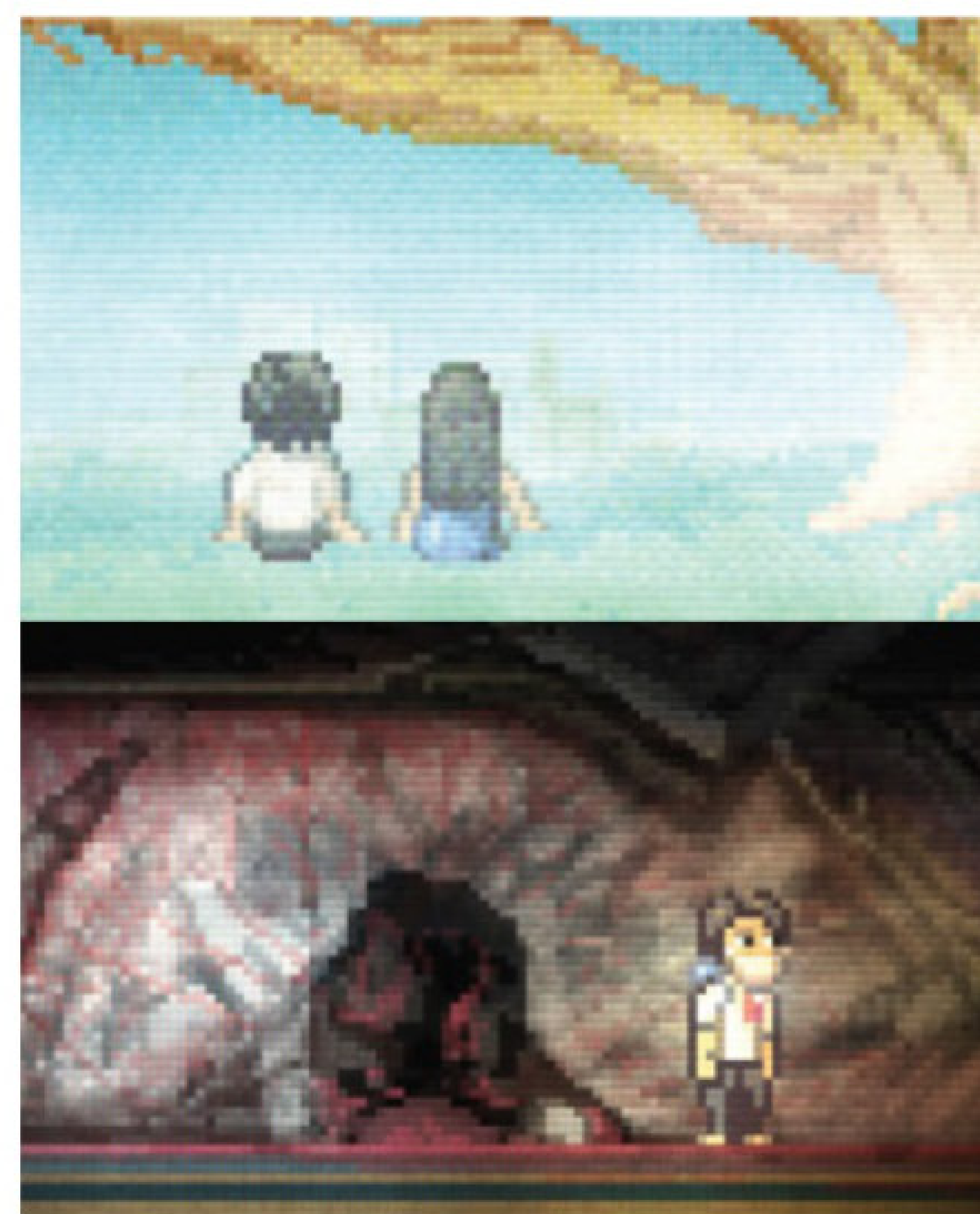
IMPROVING ON THE ORIGINAL

NEW STUFF: Two new endings and extra interactions with characters are among the new bits in this Director's Cut, though don't expect obtaining them to be easy.

VERDICT 8/10

A WELL-CRAFTED HORROR ADVENTURE ON THE RIGHT CONSOLE FOR IT





Above: This sort of retro visual style has proved to be a great match for the Vita's ridiculously sharp display. *Lone Survivor* certainly benefits from it.

A DISNEY STORY WITH NO HAPPY ENDING

Castle Of Illusion Starring Mickey Mouse

After WayForward's *The Power Of Illusion* felt content to coast along satisfying the malnourished nostalgia-glands of its audience, the second attempt to resurrect Disney's *Castle Of Illusion* series proves from the outset to be far more promising proposition.

It retains the framework of the original as Mickey investigates the realms behind a series of doors within evil witch Mizrabel's gothic palace, but rather than just give the whole thing a HD makeover a la *DuckTales Remastered*, Sega's Aussie outfit has completely overhauled the design. The hub world is now a *Super Mario 64*-style 3D castle, and each new environment is delightfully reimagined in 2.5D.

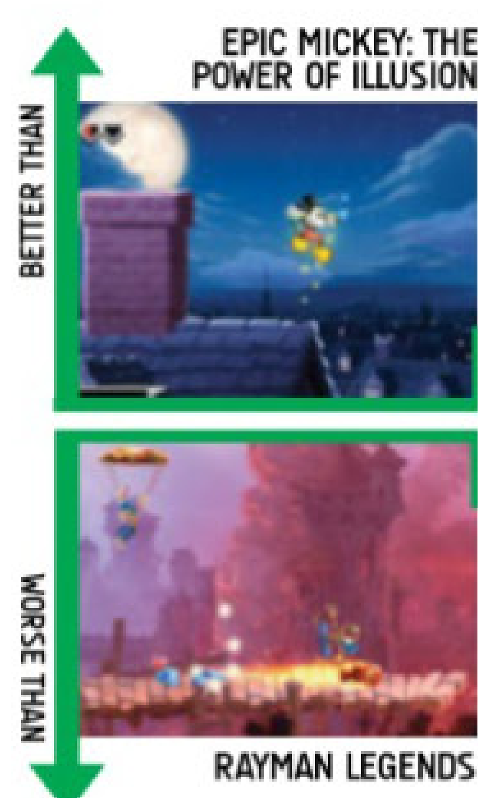
This adds an enjoyable element of surprise to the familiar locales, ensuring that even the most ardent fans of the original bum-stomping platformer will have reason to make the trip back to what is undoubtedly one of the most beloved (and unintentionally creepy) titles of its time. Yet for all the histrionic camera movements and quirky design tweaks can't hide the blatant mechanical failings underpinning the gameplay.

Let's talk about jumping – Mickey's primary manoeuvre to both squash enemies and navigate obstacles. It's hugely imprecise, lacking weight and inertia, which leads to the type of frustrating collisions and untimely deaths that you'd expect from that various *Mario*-clones that beleaguered consoles around the time of Mickey's initial punt at rescuing Minnie. It wouldn't be quite so disappointing if the rest of *Castle Of Illusion* didn't feel so considered, impressively redressing the scenery with a savvy eye on other contemporary platformers. But with such base-level functional inadequacies, this retro rehash comes labelled predictably with a 'for fans only' tag.

DETAILS

FORMAT: Xbox 360
OTHER FORMATS: PC, PlayStation 3
ORIGIN: Australia
PUBLISHER: Sega
DEVELOPER: Sega Studios Australia
PRICE: £10.99
RELEASE: US: Out now
PLAYERS: 1
ONLINE REVIEWED: N/A

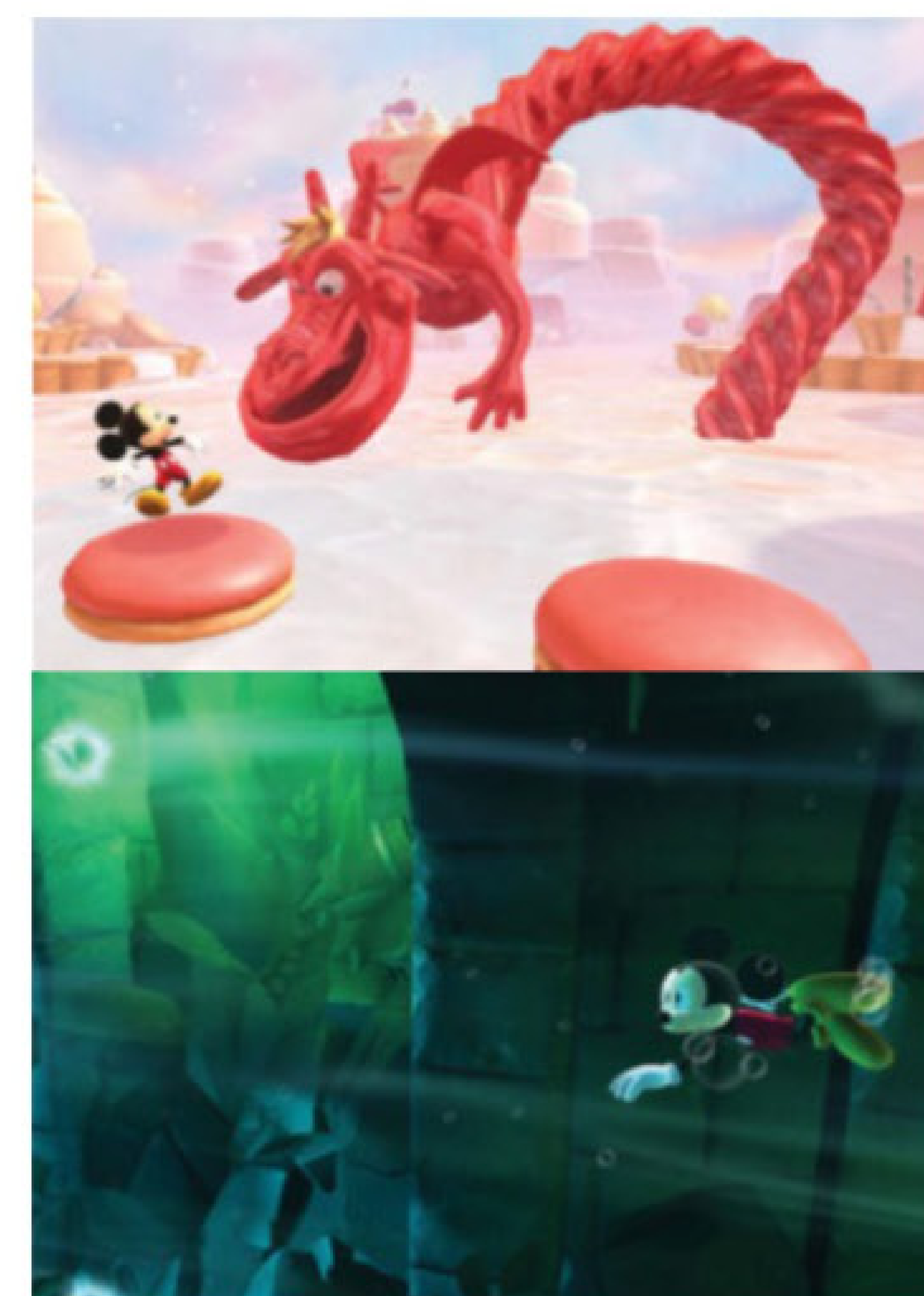
BETTER THAN: EPIC MICKEY: THE POWER OF ILLUSION



WORSE THAN: RAYMAN LEGENDS

VERDICT 5/10
AN IMPRESSIVE BUT DEEPLY FLAWED REVIVAL

Below: The story is now narrated by the actor behind *Uncharted*'s Sully, which reinforces the Disney fairy-tale vibe without interrupting the action with cutscenes.



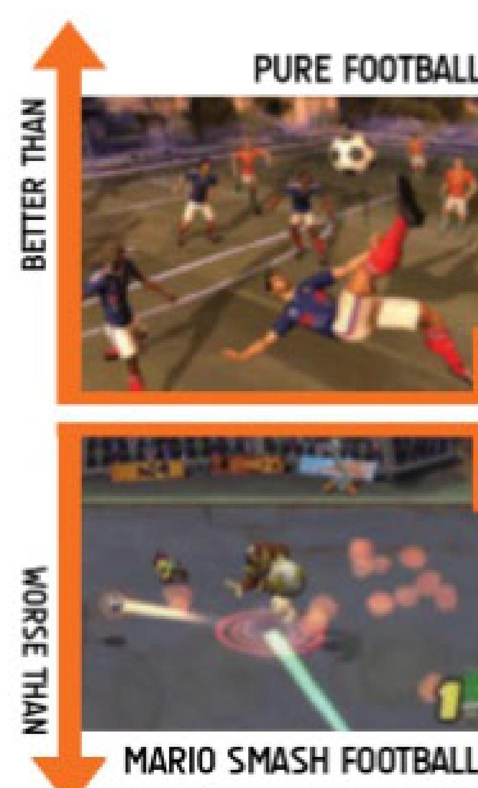
BRINGING A NEW AESTHETIC TO THE TRADITIONAL VIRTUAL XI

Inazuma Eleven 3: Lightning Bolt

DETAILS

FORMAT: 3DS
ORIGIN: Japan
PUBLISHER: Nintendo (EU), Level-5 (JPN)
DEVELOPER: Level-5
PRICE: £27.99
RELEASE: 27 September
PLAYERS: 1-2
ONLINE REVIEWED: N/A

BETTER THAN: PURE FOOTBALL



WORSE THAN: MARIO SMASH FOOTBALL

Originally released in 2010, the 3DS re-release of the original DS title unfortunately hasn't seen too much of an update – visually, nothing has changed, and the soundtrack is still locked in the DS' MIDI purgatory. *Lightning Bolt* is an incredibly colourful game, and its target audience is clear – this is a title aimed at children who are into their football. The shallow story – centralised around a group of kids trying to qualify to play for Japan's national side – is brought to life with some entertaining voice acting, the enthusiasm of which is sure to appeal to a younger audience, and the game is brimming with tutorials that could teach even the youngest players the mechanics of the game with ease.

Gameplay itself is fairly straightforward – taking the form of a standard JRPG in the overworld, players are thrust into 'Football battles' with opposing teams in four-on-four bouts where passive stats and active skills combine to deliver an action-RPG style battle. A mixture of stylus swipes and taps make your players pass and shoot, and should you find yourself in a sticky situation, you can enter a Command Battle in which players engage in ridiculous, over-the-top supermoves that can change the tide of battle instantly.

The only time the game takes advantage of the 3DS features is in the social aspects: with a couple of SpotPass, StreetPass and 3DS link options available, the game slightly redeems its lazy porting. There isn't much depth to these features outside of being able to acquire new players for your team from people you pass in the street, or collect extra items to use in battle. The features tap into that compulsive collector's mentality children have, though, and that's what matters in a title like this.





Right: There's a surprising amount of depth to the RPG side of things for players that want to indulge in it, but you can also play the game without dwelling on it too much.

VERDICT 5/10
A PERFECTLY AVERAGE NINTENDO DS PORT


APEX
RAW



Left: The game has a languid ambience to it, and driving around with a trailer full of corn can be quite calming. Despite the game's flaws, the mixture of slow driving and an easy-listening soundtrack can be almost hypnotically relaxing.

WHAT A LOAD OF CROP

Farming Simulator 2013

The idea of a simulator game is to give you an in-depth representation of a very specific aspect of a job or lifestyle. *Farming Simulator* doesn't quite achieve that, unfortunately; it's less of a sim game, and more of a lazy attempt at translating farming tasks to trivial gameplay. The option exists to run the game in real-time, and you can choose to wake up at 6am and begin harvesting your crops then if you wish, but beyond that, *Farming Simulator* on the console is a pretty cartoonified take on running a farm.

The premise is simple – at the start of the career, you're given a farmhouse, a few fields and $100,000 worth of debt. The aim is simple: manage your farm well enough to pay off your investment loan and turn a profit. You can plant and sow seeds, fertilise them to maximize your yield and then harvest them to be sold at local granaries, or you can invest your money in a limited amount of livestock, or – should you prefer – you can undertake missions using your farming hardware to help out local citizens in need.

DETAILS

FORMAT: PlayStation 3
ORIGIN: Switzerland
PUBLISHER: Focus Home Entertainment
DEVELOPER: 3 Giants Software
PRICE: £24.99
RELEASE: Out now
PLAYERS: 1
ONLINE REVIEWED: N/A

AS GOOD AS — FARMVILLE



WORSE THAN — HARVEST MOON DS

Every aspect of the game is repetitive – as you'd expect, sowing, fertilising and harvesting involves trekking in lines up and down your fields until the task is complete (you can hire staff to do this for you, and due to a bug in the game's code, seeds won't deplete if sowed by a hired hand, allowing you a direct shortcut to profit should you need it). Driving harvested crops to a depot is equally as dull – tractors with low top-speeds and dodgy driving mechanics make traversing the open world setting of your farm an unenjoyable slog, and you'll spend far more time than you'd like trundling along a badly rendered road. You can't even enjoy the ambient graphics, because the game suffers from an horrific texture pop-in from time to time that is unjustifiable when you consider the game looks like it was made for the PS2.

MISSING LINK

WHAT WE WOULD CHANGE

ANIMAL HUSBANDRY: It seems pretty odd to us that the range of animals available is so limited. For a little more variety, the game could have included more species than just the obligatory chickens, cows and sheep, and the ability to actively harvest animal produce would have given the game more longevity.

Missions are limited in their scope, and in an hour of playing, we were asked to cut the same patch of grass for a realtor twice. The only other type of missions offered to us were fetch-and-deliver quests with a forklift truck that were uninspired and mundane. Overall, *Farming Simulator* does not feel like a simulator – if the point of the game is to offer a realistic experience of what it's like to run a farm, the game fails: people never fatigue (your staff will work non-stop), livestock produce is harvested by AI automatically and there are a few game-breaking exploits that completely undermine the game. *Farming Simulator*'s saving grace is its potential use as an educational tool for those that wish to learn more about the history of farming hardware.

VERDICT 3/10
CROP CULTIVATING SIMULATOR WOULD BE MORE ACCURATE





Above: Each machine is capable of fulfilling a specific task. If you want to use the larger combine harvesters or cultivators, though, be prepared to sink a lot of hours into it, because they aren't cheap.

Grūmble
98,857 / 98,857
100 K / 100 K
85

Blitzem (*)
215 K / 215 K
74 / 100

Eyecandy (*)
193 K / 193 K
109 K / 120 K

Torch (*)
132 K / 132 K
98,627 / 100 K

Yanou (*)
145 K / 145 K
75,847 / 100 K

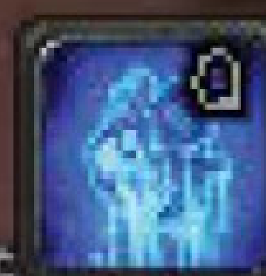






General | Combat Log

[Loot]: Yanou (Greed - 65) Won: [Irontree Knuckles of the Monkey]
Yanou receives loot: [Irontree Knuckles of the Monkey].
Your share of the loot is 16 Silver, 82 Copper.
Your share of the loot is 33 Silver, 18 Copper.
You receive loot: [Embersilk Cloth]x4.
Your share of the loot is 62 Silver, 59 Copper.
[Instance] [Torch-DefiasBrotherhood]: i'll stand on one beem
Your share of the loot is 37 Silver, 33 Copper.



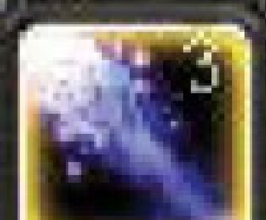






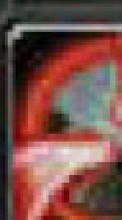




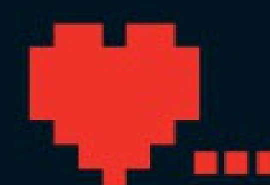






> "2013, day 1000+, I'm still playing and I still love it"
>
> NIC WATT, CREATIVE DIRECTOR, NNOOO

WHY I 

World Of Warcraft

NIC WATT, CREATIVE DIRECTOR, NNOOO

"2004, day one, I create my character and step out into this massive, beautiful world. There are so many options and places to explore. The world seems huge! I jump into some quests and begin my levelling up.

By day two or three I'm entering dungeons and finding a role I enjoy playing. It makes me feel like I'm part of a unit. Sure people can act like babies sometimes but when we all work together, it's amazing!

2013, day 1000+, I'm still playing and I still love it. When I'm down or bored I just jump in and I can find something to do. Solo some old content for cosmetic rewards, join up with guild mates to take on some silly challenge or queue up for raids and dungeons.

I think the thing that I enjoy the most is being able to play with other people co-operatively. The world is still beautiful it just feels like this big, fun, sandbox.





RETRO

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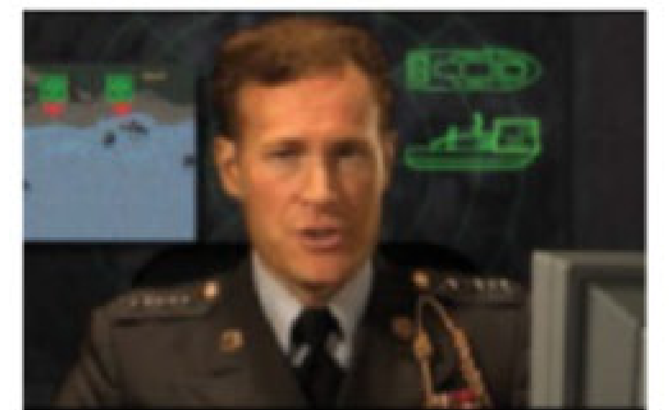
RETRO GUIDE TO SHIGERU MIYAMOTO

games™ presents the complete history of the industry's most eminent icon, tracing the design pioneer from simian kidnappers through to flower-sprouting extra terrestrials.

WESTWOOD STUDIOS

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The pioneers of the strategy genre, we take a look back at the studio that made armchair generals of the world.



CRASH BANDICOOT

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The gloves are off as Crash goes toe-to-toe with one dapper-looking dog/ kangaroo abomination.

JOHN ROMERO

132 **INTERVIEW**

John Romero makes **games™** his bitch in our interview this month. Suck it down.



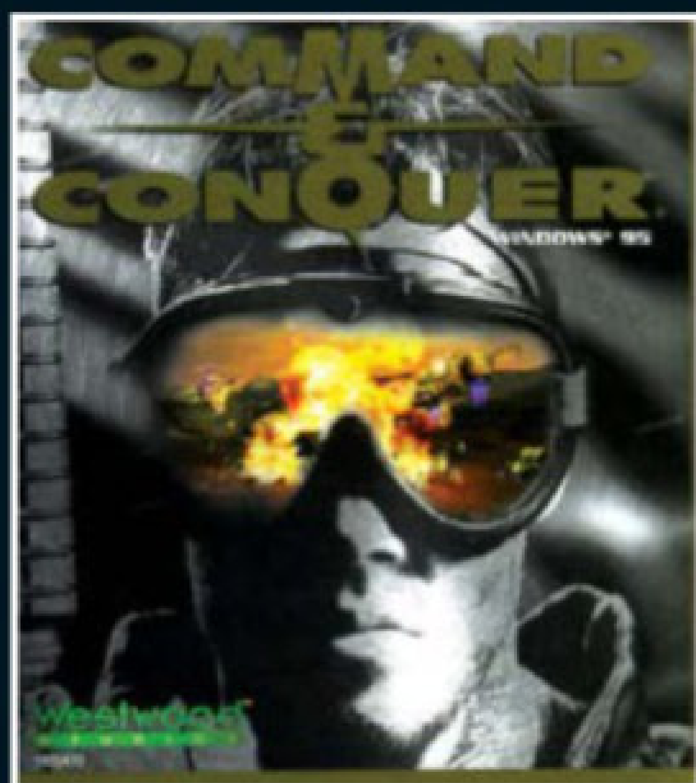
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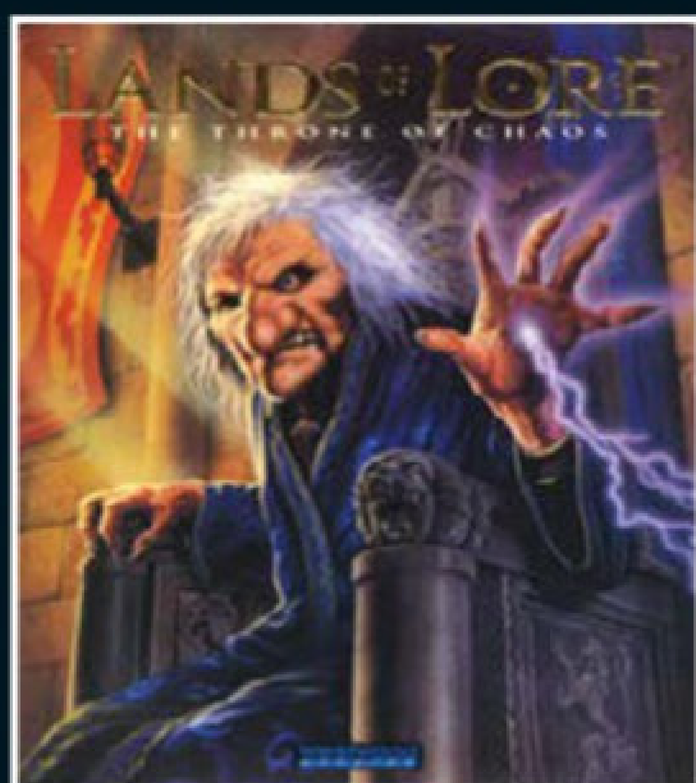
136 **GAME CHANGERS**

Leading the vanguard for console first-person shooters, Bungie's *Halo* is this month's Game Changer.



DISCUSS | Have your say on all things retro on our dedicated forum **www.gamestm.co.uk/forum**





Years active: 1985 – 2003

Key Platforms: PC DOS, PC CD-ROM, Amiga, Atari ST, SNES, PSone

Products: Eye Of The Beholder I & II, Command & Conquer and Red Alert franchises, Lands Of Lore trilogy, Legend Of Kyrandia, Blade Runner

KEY STAFF:

Brett Sperry & Louis Castle (founders) Joe Bostic, Mike Legg, Joseph Kucan, Frank Klepacki, Adam Isgreen, Rade Stojsavljevic



BEHIND THE SCENES

WESTWOOD STUDIOS

Westwood revolutionised the PC strategy market with titles like Dune II, Eye Of The Beholder and Command & Conquer. games™ caught up with the company's founders and those involved in its most pioneering projects

"WE WERE FAST, cheap, and brilliant," recounts an enthusiastic Brett Sperry, co-founder of Westwood Studios. He's talking about the early days of his company, which blossomed from a two-man garage operation into one of the most respected multi-platform developers in North America. "At the time we didn't really know what we were worth, so we won everything we pitched. But we wised up pretty fast."

Such was the lot of an Eighties games software start-up. Beginning as a contractor for publishers like Epyx and Electronic Arts, Westwood's first commercial venture, *Temple Of Apshai Trilogy*, made it the princely sum of $18,000 £11,000). "Brett knew Bob Lindsey of Epyx from work he had done previously," remembers Louis Castle, who partnered with Brett to form the company. "Brett called him up and said he had a group (two is a group, right?), and wanted to know if Epyx had any work. Bob asked if we could port Commodore 64 games to the Macintosh, and we said, 'Of course!' After all, I owned a Mac from my job at a computer store…"

"Right after we hung up the phone, I ordered the programming books, *Inside Macintosh* –1,700 pages of light reading. I had never done any Mac programming! We finished the Mac version of *Apshai* in about four months, on budget, so Bob hired our 'group' to do the Amiga and Atari ST versions. We had to hire a third person, Barry Green, to take on two games at once on all the new platforms. That propelled us to become a real company. From the very beginning we created Westwood to be a place we wanted to come to work every day."

"We got into sports and racing games with Epyx after porting *Temple Of Apshai*. Back then it was about how well you performed, so Epyx gave us the chance to succeed. I guess that hasn't changed much, but it was easier to get started back then. You just didn't need so many people, and games could be created in months, not years. It was like the way mobile phone and social network games are now, but without all the great development tools!"

"In the Eighties there was a lot of secrecy," comments Sperry. "It was an unspoken rule for independent developers to not share information on the deals they made. But we kept running into the same people at trade shows, so deal terms started to come out. Electronic Arts was the most generous of all the software companies at the time. Virgin Games was also easy to work with, and they seemed to understand that it took real capital to fuel the creator's visions. Other companies would grind every cent, which is counter-intuitive to getting the best products."

BLADE RUNNER WAS ONE OF MY FONDEST MEMORIES OF GAME DEVELOPMENT

EARLY GAMES LIKE *Mars Saga*, *Hillsfar* and *Dragonstrike* demonstrated the direction Westwood's products would take, with strong fantasy themes and strategic role-playing and adventure. "SSI [Strategic Simulations Inc] had some great work for us in the strategy game genre, so we followed the money," admits Castle. "That said, I've always loved paper game role-playing, and played *Dungeons & Dragons* with my friends for decades, so I can say I was very happy in the genre." Like





DragonStrike used an innovative fractal 3D engine for its flying sequences.

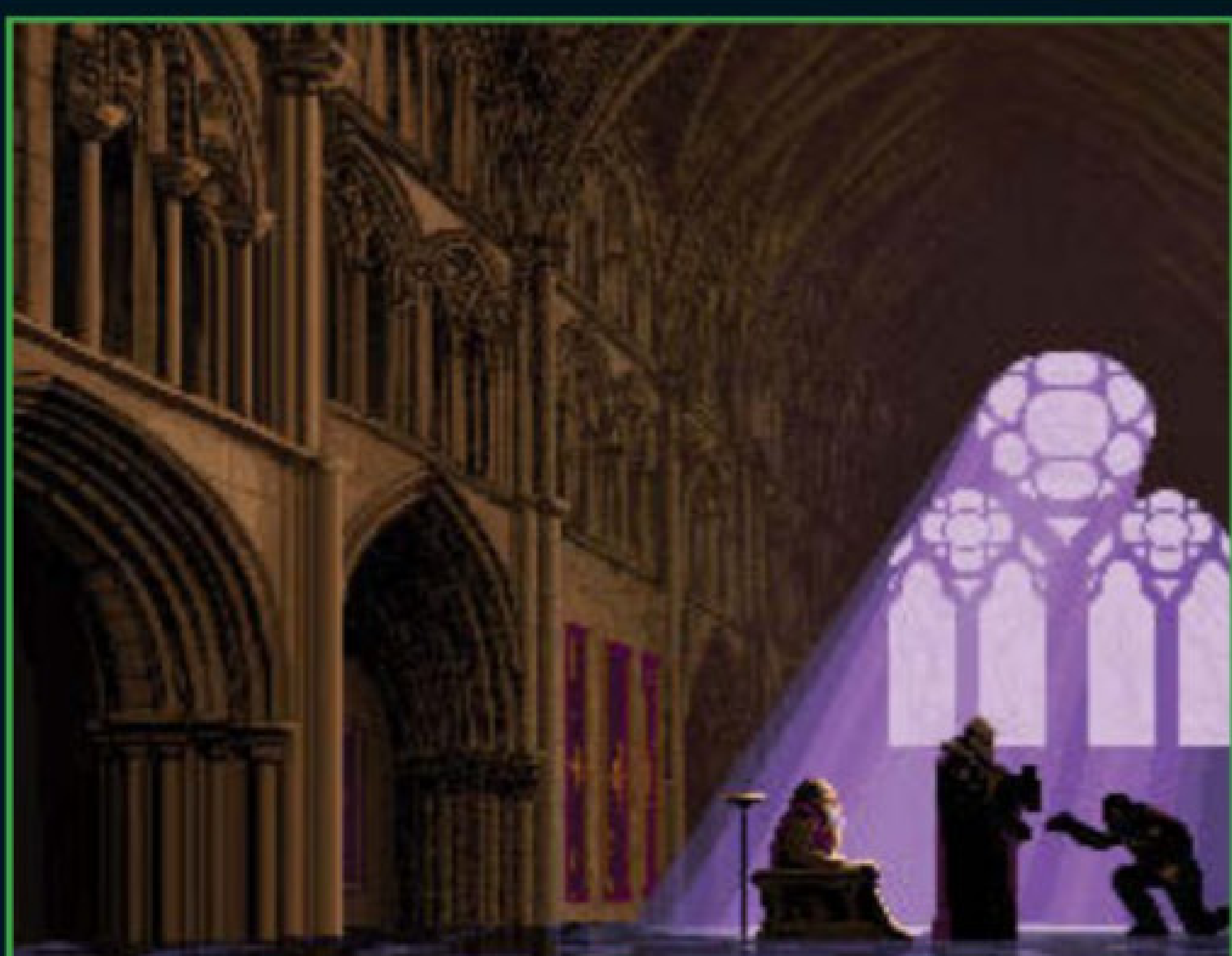






Legend Of Kyrandia sequel *Hand Of Fate* features plucky mystic Zanthia as its heroine.







Red Alert 2 was arguably Westwood's finest RTS release.

IN THE KNOW

The company was founded by Brett Sperry and Louis Castle in 1985 as Westwood Associates. The name was inspired by the Los Angeles neighbourhood of Westwood, chosen to represent the vibrant scene in the area, where Hollywood mixed with the youthful culture of UCLA.

The pair worked out of a converted garage owned by Castle's parents in Las Vegas. After a series of freelance conversions, including *Temple Of Apshai Trilogy*, *Super Cycle* and *World Games* for Epyx, the company's first original game, *Mars Saga*, was released in 1988 by Electronic Arts.

The name was changed to Westwood Studios in 1992 when the developer became part of Virgin Interactive Entertainment. The studio developed the groundbreaking real-time strategy games *Dune II* and *Command & Conquer*.

Castle's favourite Westwood projects include *Dragonstrike*, *Monopoly* and *Blade Runner*, while Brett is particularly proud of *Eye Of The Beholder* and the *Command & Conquer* series, and still plays the odd bit of *Red Alert 2*.



WESTWOOD STUDIOS: DEFINING GAMES

The games that shaped the fortunes of the PC strategy maestros…



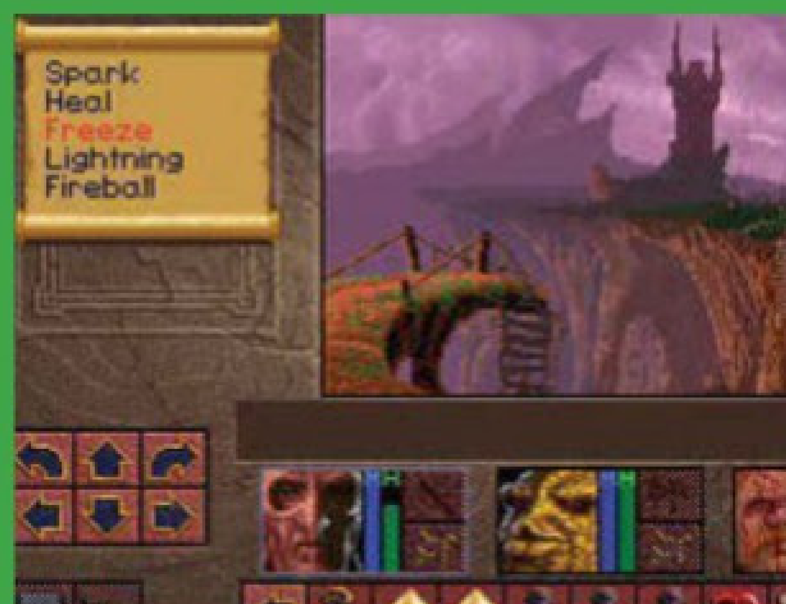
EYE OF THE BEHOLDER (1990)

With its innovative first-person real-time combat engine, it offered a level of immersion unmatched by other fantasy role-playing adventures, as you quested your four heroes beneath the city of Waterdeep.



DUNE II: BATTLE FOR ARRAKIS (1992)

Westwood pretty much invented the RTS genre with the base-building, resource harvesting and unit management of *Dune II* – a terrific interpretation of Frank Herbert's sci-fi epic.



LANDS OF LORE: THE THRONE OF CHAOS (1993)

One of its first titles to make use of the CD-ROM format, it mixed hand-drawn graphics with spoken dialogue and narration. More story-driven than *Beholder*, it was an outstanding RPG.



THE LEGEND OF KYRANDIA (1992)

While the second instalment, *Hand Of Fate*, is widely regarded as the finest game, the original introduced the quirky realm of the title, bumbling Brandon and psychotic jester Malcolm, who'd get his own entry in the series.



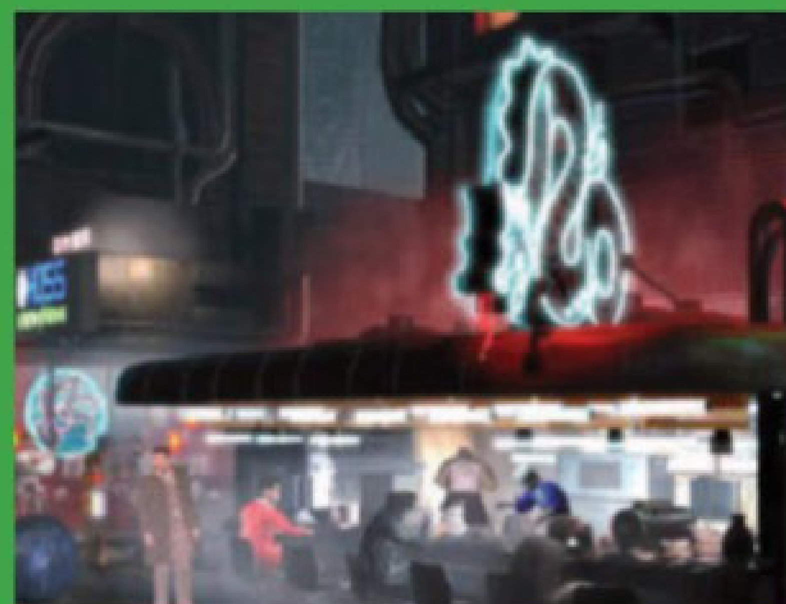
COMMAND & CONQUER (1995)

With its engaging cut-scenes and slick visuals, *C&C* was a step towards world domination for Westwood. The mouse-driven control system allowed speedy control of units, with separate campaigns for each faction.



COMMAND & CONQUER: RED ALERT (1996)

Red Alert puts you in an alternative World War where the Russians are the mortal enemy of the West. It's *C&C* with outlandish technology and a ludicrous plot, and is better for it.



BLADE RUNNER (1997)

Billed as 'the first real-time 3D adventure game,' it offered a persistent game world where other characters eked out their daily lives as you tracked replicant targets through the shadowy city streets.



RED ALERT 2 (2000)

The Soviets are invading mainland USA, and it's up to you to stop them – or join in the fun and flatten the Statue of Liberty. Our favourite moment: sinking capitalist warships with a giant squid…



Joe Kucan as Kane in *Command & Conquer*.

most strategy-oriented developers at the time, Westwood had been concentrating on turn-based products, with the exception of *Dragonstrike*, a unique 3D flying simulation with dragon-riding protagonists. But a very different kind of role-playing adventure, based on SSI's *D&D* licence, was just around the corner.

Back when Sperry and Castle were working on the *Temple Of Apshai* RPG, they had created a very unconventional prototype. "Our first playable Mac version ran in real time instead of the original turn-based play," explains Louis. "Epyx felt it was too great of a departure and that gamers would not want to have to make complicated tactical and strategic decisions under time pressure." But the idea of a real-time RPG wasn't forgotten, and coupled with what were stunning 3D-style graphics for their period, re-emerged in *Eye Of The Beholder*.

"I think *Eye Of The Beholder* is one of our proudest accomplishments from the early days," says Sperry. "It was an original project I pitched to SSI, but I told them we'd need to bend a lot of the *D&D* rules to reinvent the game in a real-time 3D game space. But we kept the game in the spirit of how *D&D* was originally intended, and it was a huge hit. No one had seen anything like it before on the PC."

Implementing real-time combat and movement in an official *Dungeons & Dragons* game could have

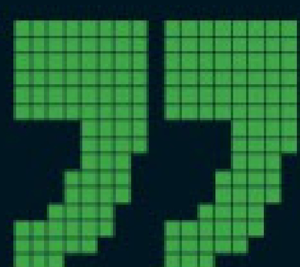

The stunning introductory sequence for *Blade Runner*.

WHAT THEY SAID…



"There's currently nothing on the PlayStation that comes even close to the quality of gameplay in [Command & Conquer: Red Alert."

Play, 90%
October 1997



been risky, but it turned out to be a masterstroke. While the Atari ST's *Dungeon Master* had tried a similar approach, *Beholder*'s superior visuals and atmosphere made it one of the best uses of the licence so far. "From the very early days we loved real-time gaming," says Castle. "We wanted to bring the sophistication of the strategy games we were used to working on to real-time play. *Eye Of The Beholder* was the perfect opportunity, since the conventional wisdom was that systems as complex as *D&D* needed to be turn based. We obviously disagreed."

"The interesting thing about *Eye Of The Beholder* was that we gained a whole new level of technology that really forced the company forward," adds Sperry. "We took what we had learned and turned our attention to one of my favourite categories – strategy. We wanted to figure out how to create a real-time experience for a top-down strategy game that was simple, fun, and had a lot of replay value. I think we built about 15-20 prototypes for that game, and the final product was *Dune II: Battle For Arrakis*."

"WE WERE WORKING with – and became acquired by – Virgin Interactive Entertainment," remembers former Westwood programmer Mike Legg. "They had done the original *Dune* adventure game, and thought that a new real-time strategy game would fit nicely into the *Dune* universe." A pioneering top-down RTS title on the Sega Mega Drive/Genesis, *Herzog Zwei*, would be a major influence. Westwood upped the ante by adding mouse control, which allowed the fine control of units and the building of freely placeable bases, made up of a roster of structures, each with their own unique beneficial features.

"We were also playing *Populous*, *Civilization* and *Military Madness* heavily at the time, and could see potential in building a game that grew from these combined game mechanics," says Joe Bostic, *Dune II*'s lead designer. "The licence was derivative of the *Dune* movie, not the book series, and making a military conflict game based strictly on the movie content was too limiting, so we decided to make *Dune II* set many hundreds of years prior. This allowed us greater freedom while still keeping the game within the familiar universe."

One game element directly inspired by the movie – the process of harvesting a resource, Spice – would become a key mechanic in later Westwood real-time strategy games. "The first thing implemented was the real-time vehicle combat," says Bostic. "Then we added base building and Spice harvesting. This came about because after we had real-time military combat going, we felt that something was needed to give the player to do that not only fit within the *Dune* universe, but also felt necessary in order to achieve victory. Harvesting Spice was the ideal solution, and since Spice means credits, the natural result followed – harvest Spice, to generate credits, to spend on military hardware."

Far from the deserts of Arrakis, Westwood was still investing in fantasy fare. The *Eye Of The Beholder* sequel, *Legend Of Darkmoon*, featured a more expansive quest and outdoor environments, traits that would evolve into the excellent *Lands Of Lore*. And the RTS template innovated for *Dune II* was famously revamped as *Command & Conquer*. Both games made use of the new CD-ROM format, allowing previously unseen level of audio-visual sophistication for PC games.

THE CD WAS VERY LIBERATING FOR US… WE TRIED TO GIVE A CINEMATIC FEEL TO OUR GAME SETTINGS

"The CD was very liberating for us," says Castle. "We always had epic stories to tell, and even with *Eye Of The Beholder* and *Dune II* we tried to give a cinematic feel to our game settings. *Lands Of Lore* was almost the perfect expression of the *Beholder* game style – it was just the right blend of RPG and real-time action. It would have been great to take that series into the next generation of games


Kucan with James Earl Jones on the set of *Command & Conquer: Tiberian Sun*.



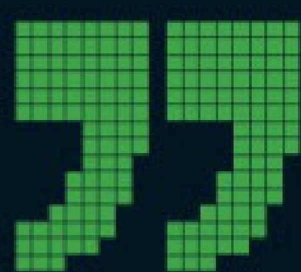
Red Alert 2 marked another step in the canonisation of the Command & Conquer franchise.

WHAT THEY SAID...



"[Command & Conquer: Red Alert] is a compelling package – one of the best you'll find in the world of PC games."

Gamespot, 9.5 November 1996



with a fully real-time 3D engine, but we just didn't have the technology in-house to do it. *Command & Conquer* gave us the opportunity to really push the cinematic feeling with full-screen audio and video."

"The thing I loved about using CD-ROMs was that it allowed for more audio," declares Sperry. "Previously, we had to be very tight-fisted on things like sound effects, dialogue and music tracks. Sound accounts for at least 60 per cent of the atmosphere of a game, and using CD-ROMs we were finally able to have characters that could speak, and beautiful soundtracks to enhance the gaming experience. We were one of the few studios that had in-house audio, because we liked to control every aspect of the game. And once CD-ROM came online, we quickly created our own green room, and even hired a director, Joe Kucan. Everything combined to give us more control and allow us to make evolutionary products."

The sense of immersion in *Lands Of Lore* was certainly improved by the lip-synching of the beautifully drawn character portraits with lines delivered by actors like Patrick Stewart. *Command & Conquer*'s full-motion cut-scenes, interspersed with cutting-edge CGI and deliberately hammy dialogue, certainly added to the appeal of the package. Cinematic director Kucan even appeared in the role of the Global Defence Initiative's nemesis, the mysterious Kane – a role he would reprise in many of the franchise's later sequels.

Command & Conquer made the same sort of leaps for real-time strategy that *Dune II* had three years previously – greatly streamlining the user interface, adding context sensitive mouse commands, and a drag-select feature for highlighting groups of units. "Being able to click on the ground to move, an enemy to attack, and a friendly unit to select greatly improved the gameplay," reasons Bostic. "Another big improvement was to lump production buildings into a sidebar menu choice so that selecting a factory in order to pick a unit to construct would be streamlined."

The game deftly replaced the Spice of *Dune II* with the mysterious resource Tiberium, and the Houses of planet Arrakis with two bitter rivals: the UN-sanctioned Global Defence Initiative and the terrifying Brotherhood of Nod. As with *Dune II*, each faction possessed separate technology trees and hardware, with the GDI's Orca hover-fighters and Mammoth Tanks against NOD's nippier Stealth and Flame Tanks. "I remember when the Flame Tanks were first unveiled in London at an ECTS show," recalls Legg. "The crowd would get bigger and bigger every time I gave my demo. When infantry caught on fire and started running around in panic, the crowd would cheer. Good times!"

"The LAN play is what made *Command & Conquer* really stand out in my opinion," adds Bostic. "It was the first time I could pit my army against an opponent in a virtual sandbox battlefield. Another great element of multiplayer action was that you could ally with another player. One of the most fun tactics was to let the other faction ally take over your construction yard so that you could build units of both factions at the same time."

While the *C&C* series would become a massive money-spinner – the original selling over 3 million copies – the years with Virgin saw plenty of alternative Westwood titles to enjoy. *The Legend Of Kyrandia* adventures were humorous and enjoyable alternatives to LucasArts games like *Loom* and *The Secret Of Monkey Island*, each of the three instalments featuring a new character to play. Westwood also entered the console market with a platform game based on the Disney hit *The Lion King* and the SNES action-RPG *Young Merlin*. Their PC version of the classic board game *Monopoly* was the first commercial title to feature online play and an internet chat feature.

"CO-OPERATIVE AND COMPETITIVE multiplayer gaming was always a goal for us," says Castle. *C&C* sequel *Red Alert* certainly embraced multiplayer internet play, adding an alternative Cold War scenario with units like attack dogs and Chrono Tanks. "*Red Alert* started as an expansion of *C&C*, but we simply fell in love with the 'what if?' prospect of an alternate history," Castle comments. "Ultimately,

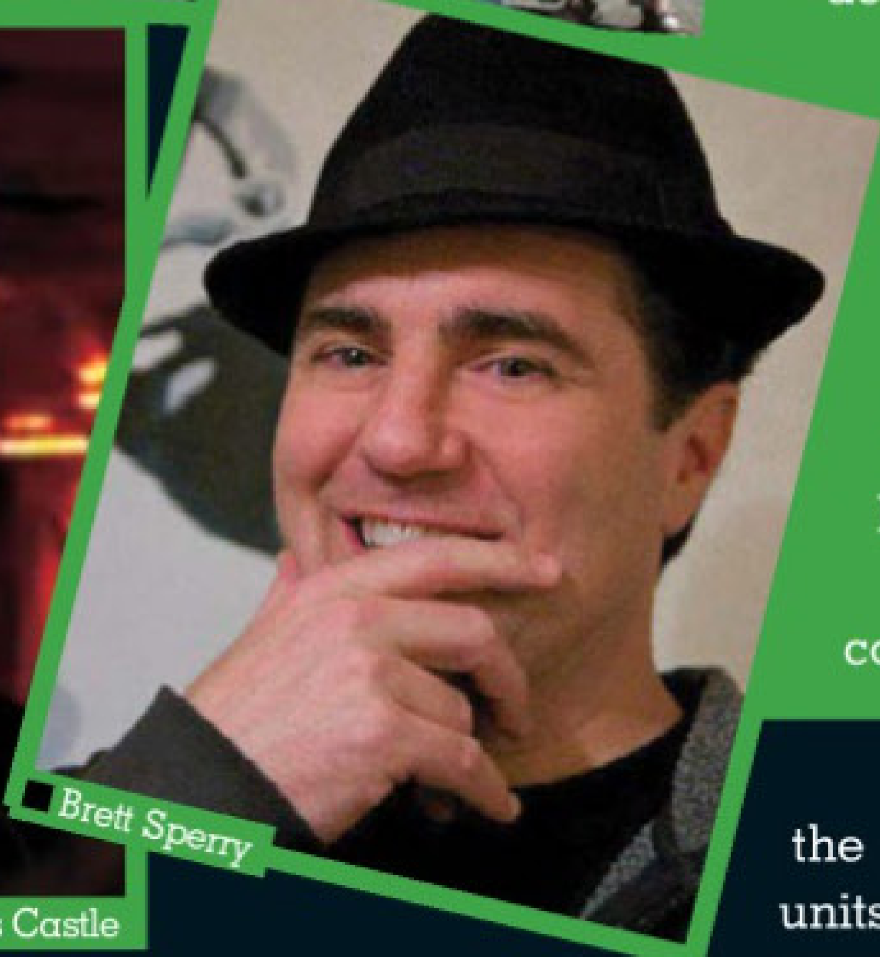


CONQUERING HEROES

■ WESTWOOD FOUNDERS Louis Castle and Brett Sperry have remained active in the games industry, with Brett founding a new company – Jet Set Games – and Louis working with Electronic Arts, Zynga, and most recently, electronic gambling developer Shuffle Master. *C&C* veterans Mike Legg and Joe Bostic went on to form Petroglyph, a company that built on the experience gained with Westwood's real-time strategy projects with *Universe At War: Earth Assault* and *Star Wars: Empire At War*, as well as board-game spin-offs like *Panzer General: Allied Assault*.

"Jet Set Games is an exciting company to me," says Sperry. "When Rade Stojsavljevic and I founded it in 2008, my goal was to create mobile entertainment. When the iPhone launched, I felt that everything was changing, and it was time to go back to pure, fun entertainment on the go. Forget these massive games that take years to develop… I love the idea of being able to entertain people with simple, quick games that are easy to get into and totally intuitive." Jet Set Games recent titles include *Highborn*, a critically acclaimed strategy game, and *The Redneckoning*, an tongue-in-cheek arcade action shooter featuring KGB-cloned space mutants and a hillbilly with a very big gun.


■ Louis Castle


■ Brett Sperry

the amount of changes in the units, story and, of course, the complete context change led to *Red Alert* having its very own space."

"The impetus for the game was the notion of going back in time to see what led up to the universe in the first *C&C*," Sperry reveals. "My initial concept was a bit closer to reality, and the design team didn't have much enthusiasm for it. So I went back and redeveloped the story with an alternate history, bringing in the key elements of fringe science like Tesla coils, mind control and ESP." With its time travelling, B-movie storyline and crazy technology, *Red Alert* was another Westwood success story, receiving an even better critical reception than its predecessor.

Outside of the RTS product lines, one of the most impressive Westwood releases from the Virgin era was a graphic-adventure based on the 1982 cult movie *Blade Runner*. "*Blade Runner* was one of my fondest memories of game development," Castle tells us. "It's still my favourite film, and I loved that we were something different and that the game still holds up visually today. We were using techniques like deferred rendering and real-time composition that had not entered into the game culture back in 1996 before there were decent 3D cards. I'm very pleased that people remember the game, not only for the incredible attention to visual detail and dedication to the franchise, but also as a truly revolutionary adventure simulator that set a high water mark for customised story experiences."

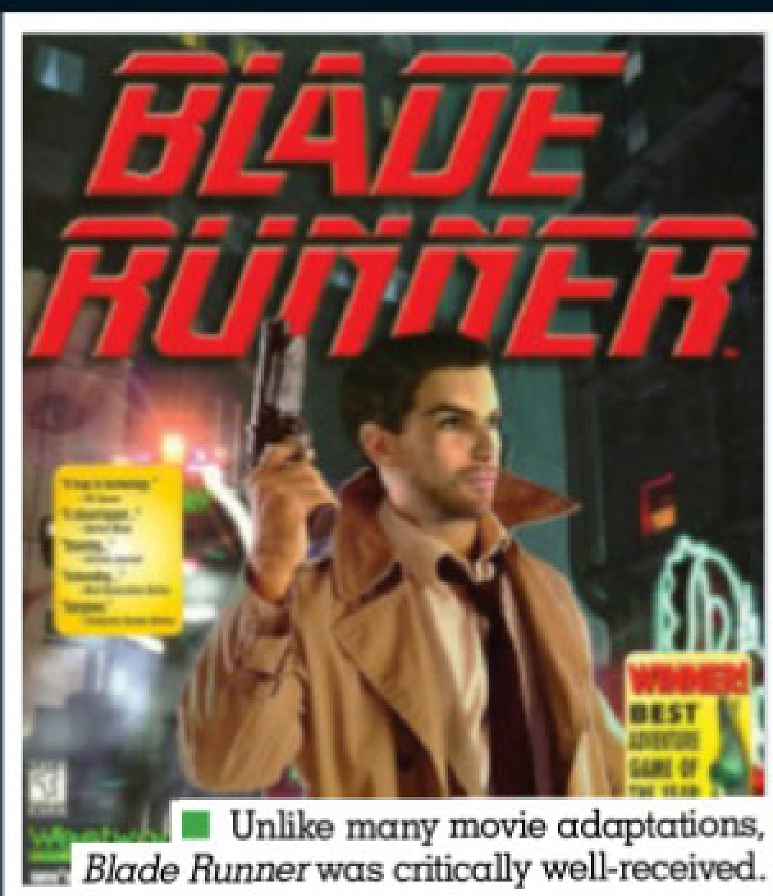
In 1998, Electronic Arts acquired Westwood Studios from Virgin in a $122.5 million (£76 million) deal. Unfortunately, the transition to EA was the start of a noticeable decline in the developer's fortunes. Sequels like *C&C: Tiberian Sun*, *Lands Of Lore III* and *Emperor: Battle For Dune* were noticeably less well-received than previous Westwood games, while the disappointing FPS *Command & Conquer: Renegade*, and the MMORPG *Earth & Beyond* were commercial disasters. Only the star-studded *Red Alert 2* emerged from this period as a bona-fide success.

"I can't put the blame at EA's feet exactly," admits Castle candidly. "We had really stretched the company to try lots of new ideas all at once, and not all of them worked out the way we envisioned them. I do think every one of those titles had moments that shined and, in fact, were spectacular in their own way. Towards the end of the Las Vegas studio in 2003, it was clear that we needed to focus back on the games that put us in such a great position in the industry. It didn't work out as well as we hoped, but I would say that the Westwood talent contributed to some amazing titles at EA, so it was not a total loss."

WE CREATED WESTWOOD TO BE A PLACE WE WANTED TO COME TO WORK EVERY DAY

"I would like to think we helped propel the industry into real-time play and higher production values," states Castle. "I think Westwood earned its page in the history books, not just because we created the real-time strategy genre, but because we brought a lot of innovations to games across the board," adds Sperry, summing up Westwood's impressive list of achievements. "We were about great entertainment, great replay value, compelling characters and story, and loads of depth." Indeed, take look at the workings behind any modern real-time strategy game, and you'll probably notice something that's a timely reminder of the days when Westwood's games conquered all.

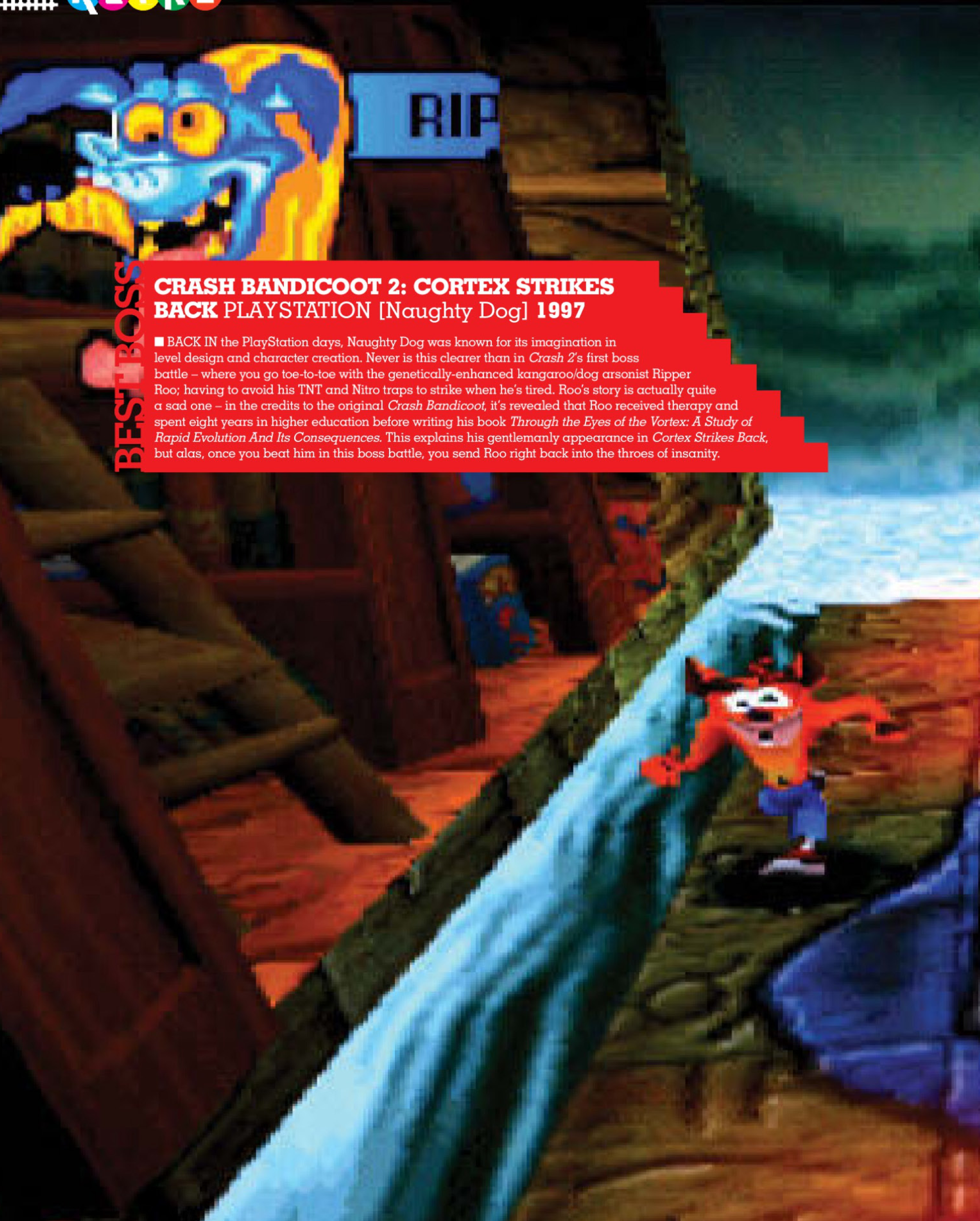

■ The level of visual detail present in *Blade Runner* was incredible.



■ Unlike many movie adaptations, *Blade Runner* was critically well-received.



■ The likes of *Red Alert* have ensured that Westwood's name lives on.



BEST BOSS

CRASH BANDICOOT 2: CORTEX STRIKES BACK PLAYSTATION [Naughty Dog] 1997

■ BACK IN the PlayStation days, Naughty Dog was known for its imagination in level design and character creation. Never is this clearer than in *Crash 2*'s first boss battle – where you go toe-to-toe with the genetically-enhanced kangaroo/dog arsonist Ripper Roo; having to avoid his TNT and Nitro traps to strike when he's tired. Roo's story is actually quite a sad one – in the credits to the original *Crash Bandicoot*, it's revealed that Roo received therapy and spent eight years in higher education before writing his book *Through the Eyes of the Vortex: A Study of Rapid Evolution And Its Consequences.* This explains his gentlemanly appearance in *Cortex Strikes Back*, but alas, once you beat him in this boss battle, you send Roo right back into the throes of insanity.









RETRO

INTERVIEW

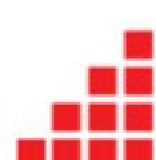
JOHN ROMERO

games™ speaks to the man behind some of the most revered works in the industry, who helped to establish the most dominant genre in gaming

The world of computer gaming has numerous prodigal sons, world changers and borderline rock stars, yet few can justifiably claim to be all three. With a career spanning more than 30 years, a number of highs and lows along the way and a portfolio full of titles any game designer would kill to have been a part of, John Romero fits the bill perfectly. games™ speaks to one of the minds responsible for death matches, e-sports, the decades-long dominance of first-person shooters and, unfortunately, *Daikatana*...



The technology may change, but the hair remains the same.



Tell us a bit about young John Romero and early life for you.

I grew up largely in northern California in a little town called Rocklin, and I was totally addicted to arcade games, like pretty much everyone who was a kid back then. I moved to Rocklin in 1976, but even before then I was living in Tucson, Arizona, and I used to play pinball all the time before the pinball places changed into videogame arcades. I remember playing a lot of the electro-mechanical games like *Dune Buggy*. When I was in California I played every game that came out. As soon as something new arrived I played it because I was in the arcades almost every day. I can remember the first time I saw certain games, like *Donkey Kong* or *Pac-Man*, or even *Targ*. Remember, as a 10 or 11-year-old kid you need quarters to play these games, [I didn't] have a job or parents with tons of money, so I had a paper route I'd deliver every morning. I was basically making $250 a month delivering papers, and using all that money on arcades.

That's a lot of quarters!

Yeah! That definitely fuelled some of the $1 billion worth of quarters that *Pac-Man* made in 1980!

Was it all arcades? What about early computer gaming?

Well, in the summer of 1979 my friend and my brother rode their bikes to the house and told me 'Oh my God, you won't believe it – we found a way to play games that doesn't cost any money!' and I'm like 'Where is this place?' We all took our bikes and rode up to the college, which was about three miles away and went to the computer lab. Inside there were all these terminals connected to a giant machine in the next room, which was an HP9000 mainframe.

QUAKE DID NOT BURN BRIDGES BETWEEN PEOPLE OTHER THAN BETWEEN JOHN CARMACK AND MYSELF

CAREER HIGHLIGH
FORMING ION STORM



■■■ In November 1996, Romero, having left id Software after the release of *Quake*, formed another game development company with the slogan 'Design Is Law' as its guiding principle. Along with long-time friend and colleague Tom Hall and industry veteran Warren Spector, the eventually ill-fated Ion Storm would produce both critical hits and misses, with a catalogue that included the likes of *Deus Ex*, *Daikatana* and *Thief: Deadly Shadows*.



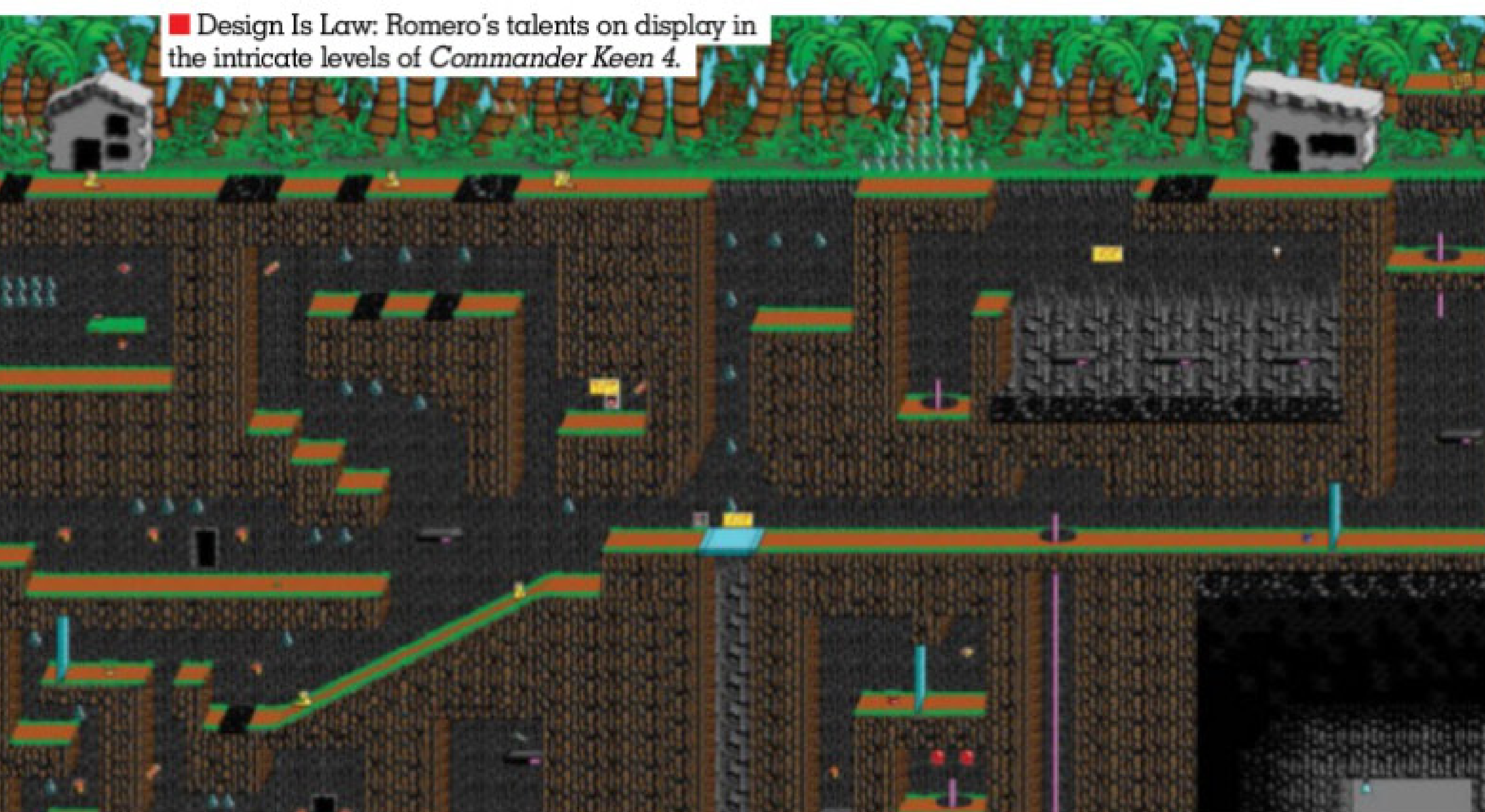
To increase visibility, id Software allowed computer retailers to package and sell *Doom*'s shareware levels for $10.

The guys there said, 'Yeah, we have different games here, but they're free because you just run them and they'll come up on the screen.' They showed the games they had, including *Adventure*, which was the best one out of all the games there. They also had things like *Poison Cookie*, *NIM* and *Hunt The Wumpus* – but *Adventure* was the greatest. There was a book there called *101 BASIC Computer Games* by David Ahl, and all of those games were on that mainframe. I played all of these games and found it very interesting how these were all very different to the arcade machines because they didn't have graphics – they all used letters and there was no time pressure. To me this was a huge revelation, because I wasn't pressured to hurry up and I could take my time, so that was a little bit of game design exposure that I found interesting.

And that is how you started out making your own games?
Yeah, for the next two years I was going to that college and trying to write little games and save them out on punch cards with paper tape and just learn more. I'd ask the college students, 'What word is this?' or 'How do I do this thing?' and so they would just tell me, and I built my vocabulary just from asking questions, because I didn't have any of my own books on it. Then in the summer of 1980 the college filled a room with Apple IIs, and when I saw that I was like, 'Whoa, colour and sound! I don't care about any other computers now!' I already knew a little bit about BASIC at that time, so now I was learning about the specifics of the Apple II, and if for some reason I couldn't get to the college then I'd go to a computer store and play on an Apple II there, or go to Radio Shack and use a TRS-80. I was so interested in computers that I would sit at the Radio Shack for hours typing out a program from a type-in book just to see what would happen, and I'd start modifying it to see how it all worked. I spent so much time on this that my dad recognised that maybe I had something, so he got me my own Apple II, and that was like a rocket going off. As soon as I got that, that was it – I lived on that computer at home. Up until then I lived a normal kid's life – you know, going outside, blowing things up, getting up to crazy stuff, until that computer came – then it was over. I was on that thing all the time, playing everything I could and making lots of games. By the end of 1982 I was halfway through my sophomore year at high school and had created my own little games company, Capitol Ideas Software.



Much of id Software's popularity revolves around the company's first-person shooters, but what can you tell us about developing the *Commander Keen* series?
Well, John Carmack had just started with Softdisk, and the first game we did was a vertical-scrolling *Xevious* clone called *Slordax*. When I saw he was doing this I could see it was great, even though I was not so excited about vertical scrolling. I was more excited about horizontal scrolling because that would let us do platform games. We got that first game done and he began experimenting with the more advanced stuff one could do with the graphics card, and he stayed up with Tom Hall until 5am one night, put together a demo and copied it on a disk and put it on my computer. I came in the next day, I think it was 18 September 1990. I put the disk in, thinking "Ah-ha, they must have


Design Is Law: Romero's talents on display in the intricate levels of *Commander Keen 4*.

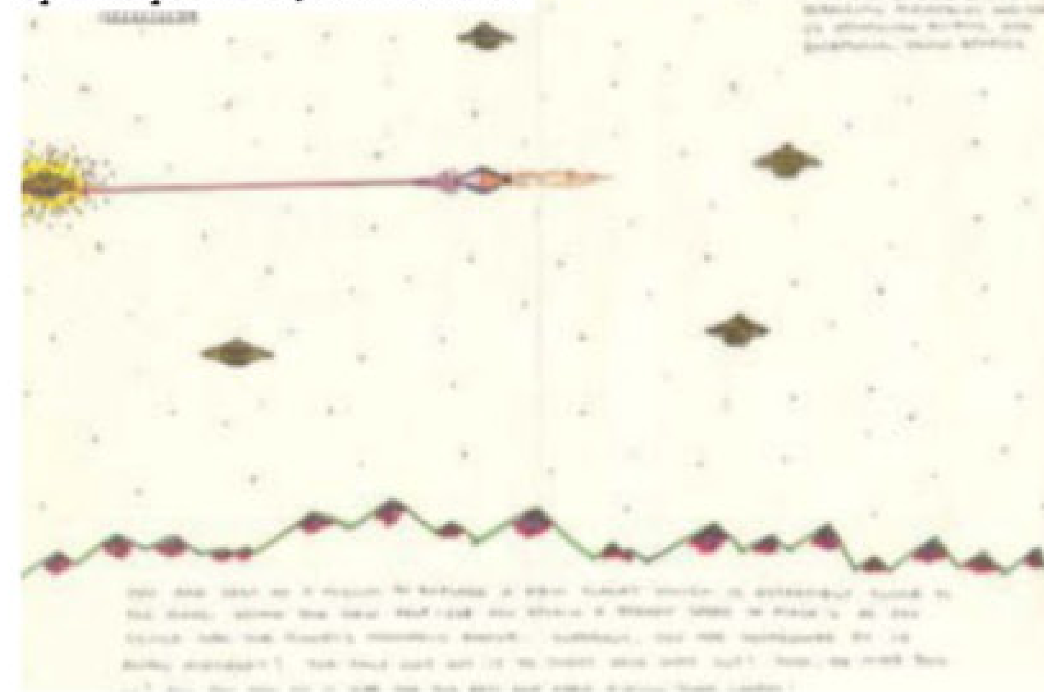
CAREER HIGHLIGHT THE DAIKATANA FIASCO



One of the most notorious commercial failures in gaming history, John Romero's *Daikatana* suffered from a number of major issues when it was eventually released almost three years behind schedule. Romero's passion for the modding community saw him hire an entire team who had never made a game before – something which he admits was his biggest mistake. Yet it was the marketing of the game that most people remember: a bright red ad with the words 'John Romero is about to make you his bitch'. "That was not my idea," said Romero. "That was Mike Wilson, who was in marketing. That was a pretty bad thing to do, to put that out there. I never talk like that when I'm deathmatching. I don't call people my bitch, you know? I call them names!"

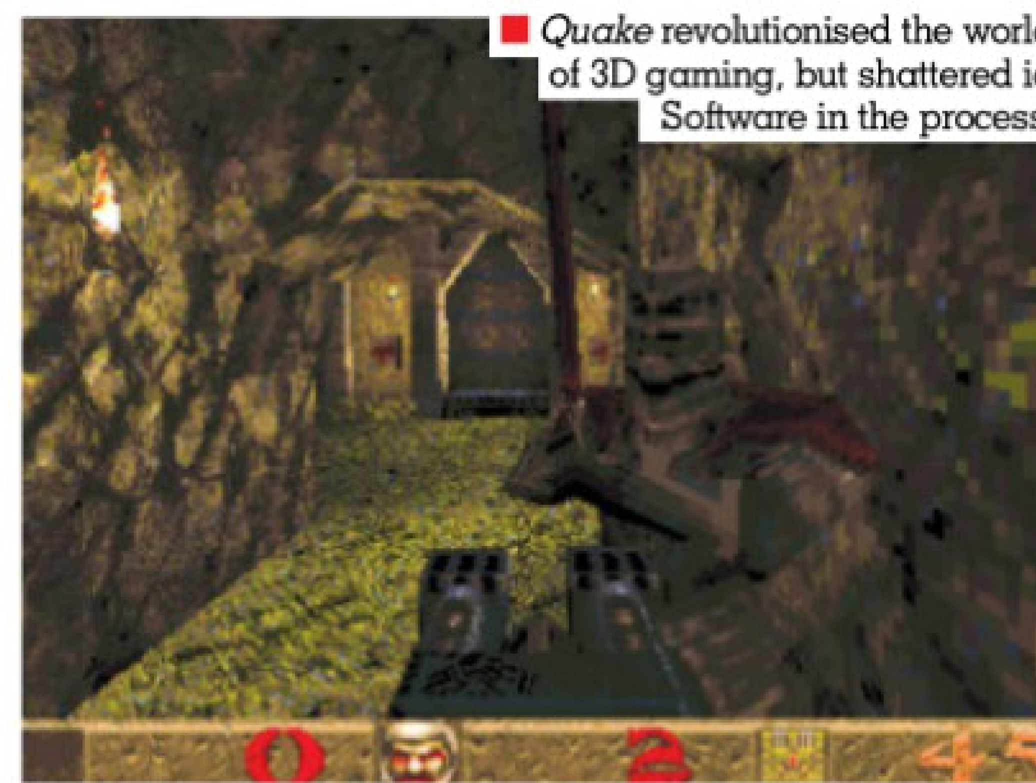
done something cool last night!" I ran the demo, and it looked like a replicated *Super Mario 3* level from the NES, but running on a PC. And it was on demo mode, so as soon as the character started running around and the screen scrolled it was perfectly smooth. I was like 'Oh my god…' I couldn't work for the next three hours!

Now onto *Wolfenstein 3D*… When that came out it just blew everyone out of the water.
We were all brainstorming one day for the next game to make, and I said 'Why don't we just redo *Castle Wolfenstein* in 3D?' Me, Carmack and Tom Hall were all major *Castle Wolfenstein* freaks, so that was it. We were going 'Can you imagine killing Nazis in 3D? There's no game like that!' One thing people don't really know is that the game ran at 70fps because the video controllers of the time ran at 70fps, unlike today, where they're mostly working at 60. So all of the technology behind it was built in four months, from January to April 1992, it was released on 5 May 1992 and the response was just massive. Like, *Commander Keen*'s sales were a joke compared to *Wolfenstein*. That first month we sold 4,000 copies and were doing phone interviews, and the local news came over and videoed the team. We really knew we were onto something – this 3D, violent thing is huge! [laughs]


An early game design from 1983 by a 15-year-old John Romero.

Quake was not only one of your greatest achievements, but it also shattered apart the team that had built all these great games. What can you say about that?
It's pretty crazy. I guess it kind of goes to show that we were extremely intense in our efforts to make that game, and that intensity carried on for a year and a half. That was 50 per cent longer than we'd ever spent making a game before. It was very hard, working in the same room every day, seven days a week, and when the game came out, half the company left. Even towards the end of the game, American McGee didn't even show up for work for the last month because he was just broken. Everybody was just done, and I was done too. The only friendship that got affected by that was between Carmack and myself. Everyone else, we're all still friends, and whatever happened in the past is all forgiven, and I'd work with any of them again in an instant. *Quake* did not burn bridges between people other than between John and myself. Other than that, everyone else has gotten along pretty well.

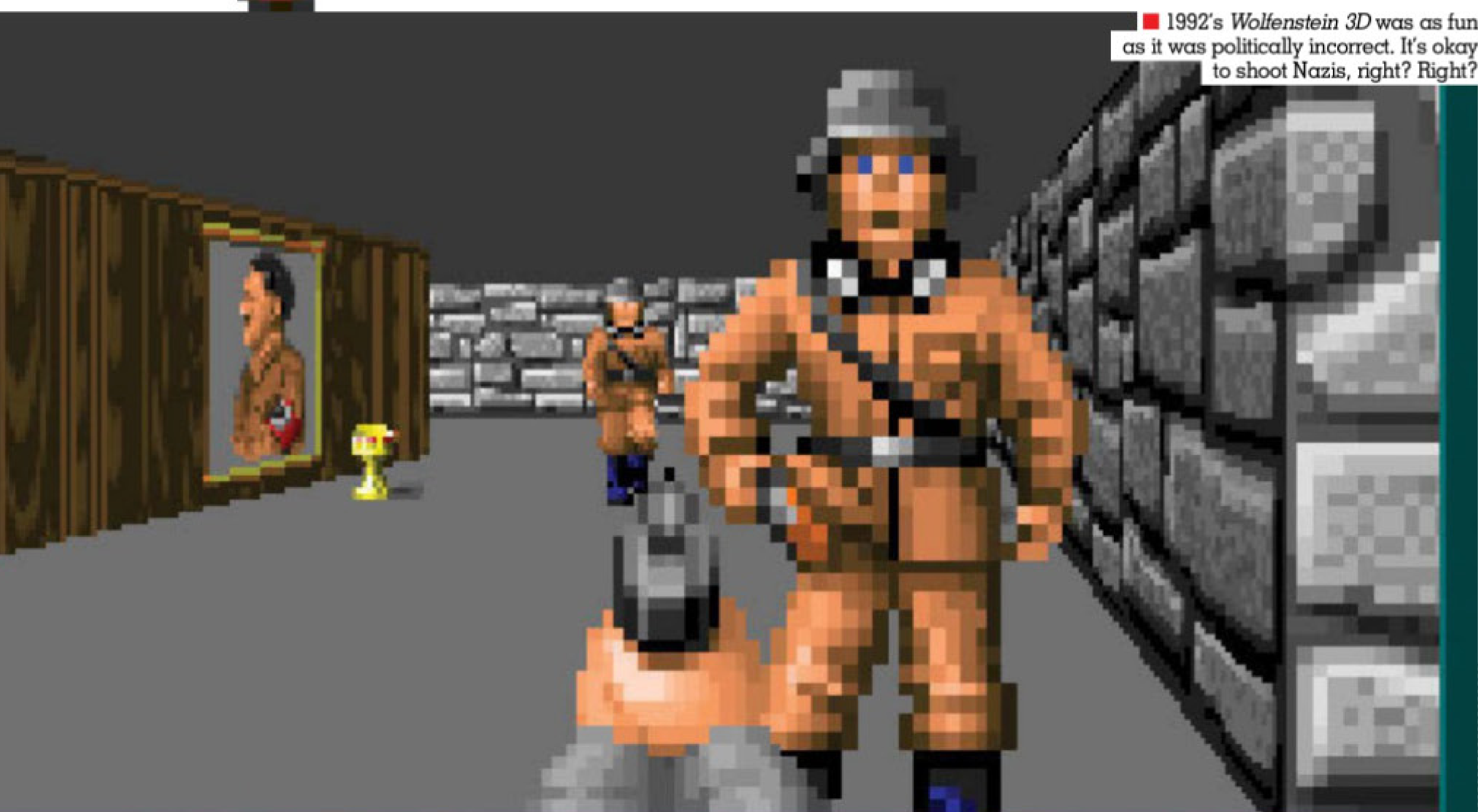
WE REALLY KNEW WE WERE ONTO SOMETHING… THIS 3D, VIOLENT THING IS HUGE!


Quake revolutionised the world of 3D gaming, but shattered id Software in the process.

What occurred with you and Carmack?
In 1995, when I wasn't working directly on *Quake*, and John was working really hard on it, I was busy with all the other stuff in the company. *Heretic* had just come out, and I was dealing with that, as well as the development of *Hexen* with Raven. There was also the re-release of *Doom* to retail, the amount of things going on was huge, and I was the only one doing these things, and I think John didn't feel like I put enough into *Quake*. I was building the level editor with John so that all of the level designers could build levels, and I kind of waited until the engine was ready to make the game. It took about a year to get to that point, and so I think that he was mad because I wasn't on the game like he was on the game. I think that upset him, and it could have gotten fixed if we had reorganised the company into an engine development team and a game development team. If we could have carried on making games in the *Doom* engine and then when the *Quake* engine was ready switched over to that, that would have been an optimal strategy for the company, but we did not really analyse the problem back then. All we really knew was how to work on the game together. Looking back, I believe that was a mistake.

Is there one project that you look back on that you're most proud of? Do you have a favourite child, so to speak?
Oh, *Doom*, definitely. It was so much fun to make. We were hitting on all cylinders and it just was the perfect game at the right time, and the right team working on it. It just all worked perfectly, and even though we worked really hard making it, it was the most fun hard work ever.




1992's *Wolfenstein 3D* was as fun as it was politically incorrect. It's okay to shoot Nazis, right? Right?





GAME CHANGERS

HALO: COMBAT EVOLVED

Released: 2001 **Publisher:** Microsoft Game Studios **Developer:** Bungie **System:** Xbox



Halo: Combat Evolved's port to PC was largely unspectacular, though being able to use banshees in the game's larger maps was a real bonus at the time.

When Halo exploded onto the scene at the start of the millennium, it established the first-person shooter as a valid console genre and introduced subtle gameplay innovations that are still emulated today

FOR THE MAJORITY of gamers, Xbox and *Halo* are symbiotic. If you were one of the 5 million people who picked up the original *Halo* at the launch of Microsoft's first console, then chances are the brand and world of *Halo: Combat Evolved* has, in some way, shaped how you play games. Bungie's first console offering is widely regarded as a landmark for console gaming; it was the first first-person shooter on a pad that used dual-stick mechanics to the standard that we see in games nowadays.

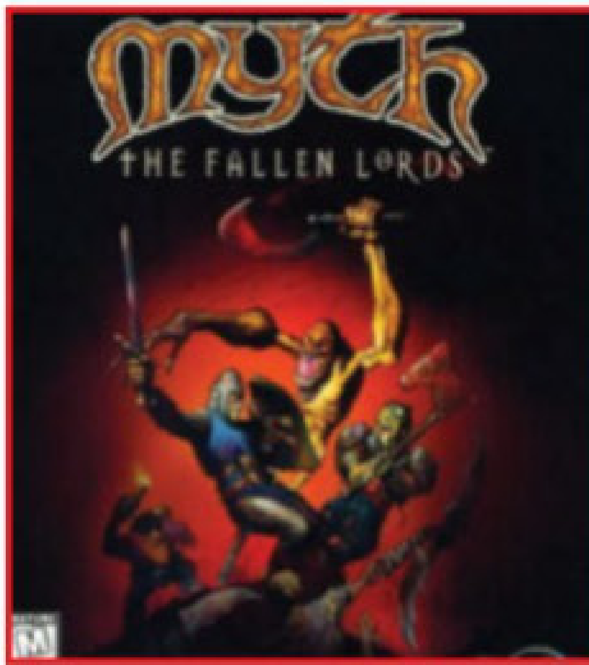
Halo ushered a whole section of the gaming community into the FPS realm – the genre was once the domain of keyboard and mice players on PCs and Macs, and the thought of dropping into the first-person perspective with a pad seemed ghastly. While *TimeSplitters* and *GoldenEye* had come before and shown that it *could* be done, *Halo* took the best parts of its peers and fused them together to create a game that defined console gaming for the new millennium.

Many of the standard tropes we see in modern FPS games owe their shape to the original *Halo*. Before the sci-fi shooter's release, FPS games would have seemingly infinite weapon slots, letting you choose and equip your loadouts on the fly. *Halo* dropped that mechanic in favour of a two-weapon system, where you could raid the battlefield for weapons discarded by your foes should one of your guns become depleted. Grenade usage was also altered – forgoing the conventions of its day, *Halo* opted to map grenades to their own button, so they were always usable and could be thrown on a twitch-instinct basis. Mix in the fact that *Halo* was the first game to introduce a rechargeable shield (alongside health packs that were later phased out), and you had a FPS that pretty much created its own sub-genre.

These alterations to gameplay made *Halo* a more tactical shooter, with an emphasis on strategy and foresight. No longer could you rush into a level all guns blazing – a desperado attempt at clearing out a

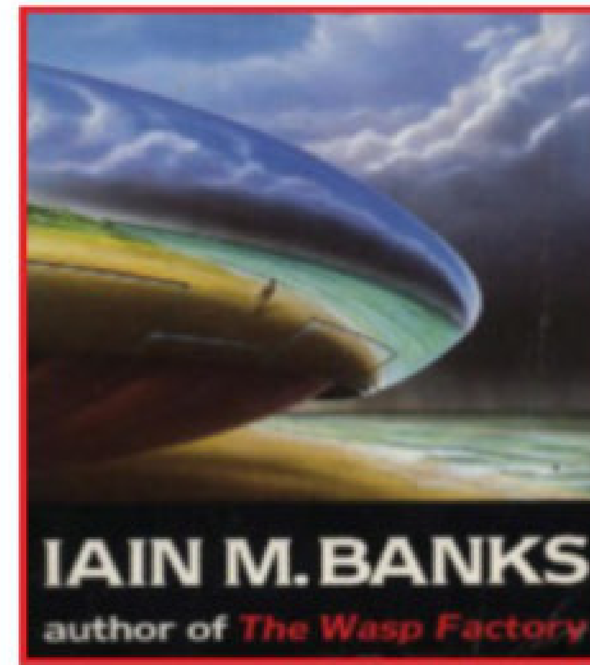
THE ANATOMY OF HALO

THE ART DIRECTION OF HALO IS SOME OF THE MOST ICONIC IN GAMING, BUT WHERE DID IT COME FROM?



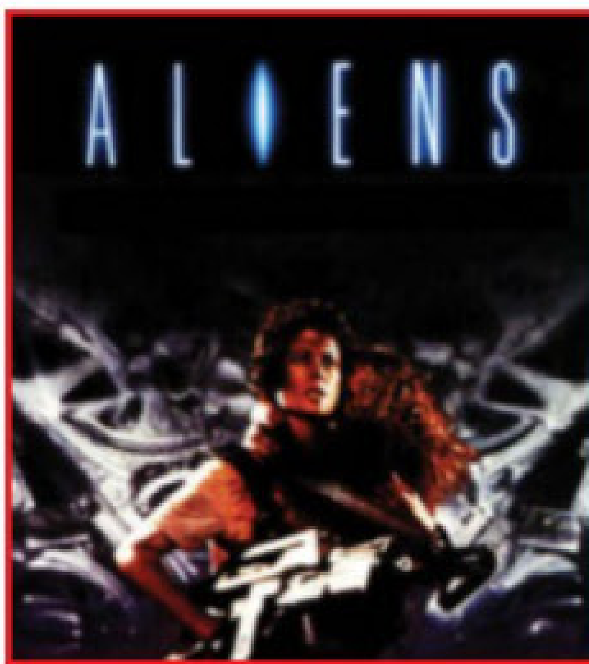
MYTH

★ The initial conception of *Halo* was to 'basically be *Myth* in a sci-fi universe', according to a blog on Bungie's site. Another Bungie game, *Myth*, classified itself as a 'real-time tactics game'. There were builds of *Halo* that adhered to this genre – where the player controlled marines in real-time 3D that had access to prototype Ghosts and Warthogs.



IAIN M BANKS

★ The titular Halo rings that surround the world are symbolic and defining megastructures within the gameworld, and are inspired partly by Iain M Banks' sci-fi Culture series of novels, with Bungie designers citing *Consider Phlebas* and *Excession* in particular as key influences on the design of *Halo*.



ALIENS

★ Aside from the obvious connections between the Flood drones and *Alien*'s facehuggers, there's also an influence that ties into Sgt Johnson's character design – he and *Aliens*' Sgt Al Apone spring from the same clichéd character trope: both surly, black marines depicted exclusively with a fat cigar hanging out of their mouths.



MARATHON

★ *Halo* was always a spiritual successor to Bungie's breakout hit *Marathon* (and its sequel, *Marathon 2: Durandal*). Bungie even stated upon *Halo*'s release that while the layman will enjoy the game, *Halo* would have the most appeal to fans of the developer. References to the *Marathon* series are still visible in the 343 Industries *Halo* games.

structure. *Halo* established itself as a more cerebral brand; a thinking gamer's FPS that forced you to plan ahead.

THE AI COMPOUNDED the game's strategic element – smarter and more dynamic than anything before it, *Halo*'s AI engine ran unscripted encounters with the Covenant, a devoutly religious alien race that saw protagonist Master Chief as the antichrist and would stop at nothing to destroy him. The random nature of enemy encounters made firefights more chaotic, and gave an added element of challenge to the myriad battles you'd fight throughout the game. Since *Halo*, intelligent enemy AI has become the standard, but at the game's launch, the different behavioural patterns enacted by the Flood and the Covenant were truly ground-breaking.

The level design in *Halo* was an advert for what the Xbox could achieve. For an Xbox launch game, *Halo* managed to extract a ridiculous amount of power from the console; the levels *Halo* showcased were huge, and the game had no issue running the impressive graphics or animations. Even compared to the PC releases of the day, *Halo* was massive. It operated on a scale unseen in FPS games, with maps and levels so large that Bungie introduced vehicles to help traverse the terrain. Once again, vehicular combat was something never before seen in a FPS, and for a first-time incorporation into a game, Bungie worked wonders with the driving mechanics.

Level design was symbiotically tied with narrative in *Halo*, playing with the way gamers would explore and progress through the game. The first set of missions would have you pushing through the world you'd crash landed on – an almost alpine alien realm encircled by the eponymous Halo ring – before you were chased back through the same areas you'd already explored. This sounds trite, but the repeated textures and environments were populated by a variety of encounters, culminating in ambitious four-way battles between the player, the Covenant, the zombie hoard-style Flood and the planet's native defence systems, the Sentinels. It was this scope – this immense scale – that drove home exactly what *Halo* and the original Xbox could achieve.

Bungie didn't stop at single-player, though; *Halo* was the first console game to have an option to play 16-player LAN on its open multiplayer maps. Despite the lack of online capability (that would come in *Halo 2*), *Halo*'s multiplayer mode was a huge success – popularising LAN parties for console gamers by taking advantage of the native connectivity that had been worked into Xbox consoles.

Halo was a significant release in the history of both the FPS and the Xbox, and after its phenomenally successful launch, it's clear to see why it became the flagship title for Xbox. It's a huge credit to Bungie that, 12 years on, the *Halo* name carries the same weight it did at launch. There's a lot to be said of legacy in the games industry, and it's safe to say that with *Halo*, Bungie introduced a series that will rest in the annals of gaming history forever.

THE LEVEL DESIGN WAS AN ADVERT FOR WHAT THE XBOX COULD ACHIEVE

KEY FACTS

- It's estimated that *Halo* was the second highest-grossing game of the 128-bit era, achieving revenue of $170 million, just behind *GTA: Vice City*'s $300 million.
- The online gameplay the series is now famous for didn't ship on the original Xbox game; rather, it was added for the PC port two years later. This was because Xbox Live wasn't ready for the game's initial release.
- Bungie was originally making *Halo* to run on Windows and Mac, but when Microsoft saw what potential it had as a studio and bought them out, *Halo* became an Xbox exclusive.

GAME CHANGERS

10 THINGS YOU MAY NOT HAVE KNOWN ABOUT HALO



YOU MAY HAVE SPENT 2002 IN HALO'S CAMPAIGN MODE AND HURLING GRENADES IN NETWORK PLAY, BUT SOME INTERESTING TRIVIA MIGHT HAVE PASSED YOU BY…



1 THE GAME WAS NEVER SUPPOSED TO BE CALLED HALO: COMBAT EVOLVED

HALO: COMBAT EVOLVED was never intended to carry such a weighty title. Microsoft was concerned that *Halo* would sound too non-military – maybe even religious. Bungie refused to budge on the title, however, so Microsoft offered a compromise – opting to stick the 'Combat Evolved' suffix on the end.



2 LEGENDARY MODE IS MORE THAN JUST A DIFFICULTY SETTING

THE MOST DIFFICULT mode in the game gives you more than just harder gameplay – it offers different dialogue options and shakes up the level design. The tutorial is cut out, Johnson gives different speeches, tighter time limits are imposed and weapons are removed – modifiable by collectable skulls in later games.



3 SGT JOHNSON HAS A TWIN BROTHER

THAT'S RIGHT. IN one cutscene, where some marines are enduring a speech from Johnson, another Sgt Johnson drives past in a warthog behind him. Then, in a bonus scene taking place during the Legendary ending, Johnson is shown hugging an Elite as an explosion closes in on him. Except this isn't Johnson – Bungie have joked that it was his twin brother (for the sake of continuity).



4 HALO HELPED LAUNCH MACHINIMA INTO THE CRAZE IT IS TODAY

HALO'S ENGINE PROVIDED the perfect atmosphere for machinima-makers around the world to practise their trade. Rooster Teeth managed to create the seminal machinima Red Vs Blue thanks to the open nature of the *Halo* engine, something Bungie were aware of – eventually implementing built-in machinima-friendly tools in *Halo 3*.



Feb 16, 1999

Subject: Closure

MIME-Version: 1.0

X-Priority: 3

I have walked the edge of the Abyss
I have governed the unwilling
I have witnessed countless empires break before me
I have seen the most courageous soldiers fall away in fear
[I was there with the Angel at the tenth]

I have seen your future.
And I have learned.

There will be no more Sadness. No more Anger. No more Envy.

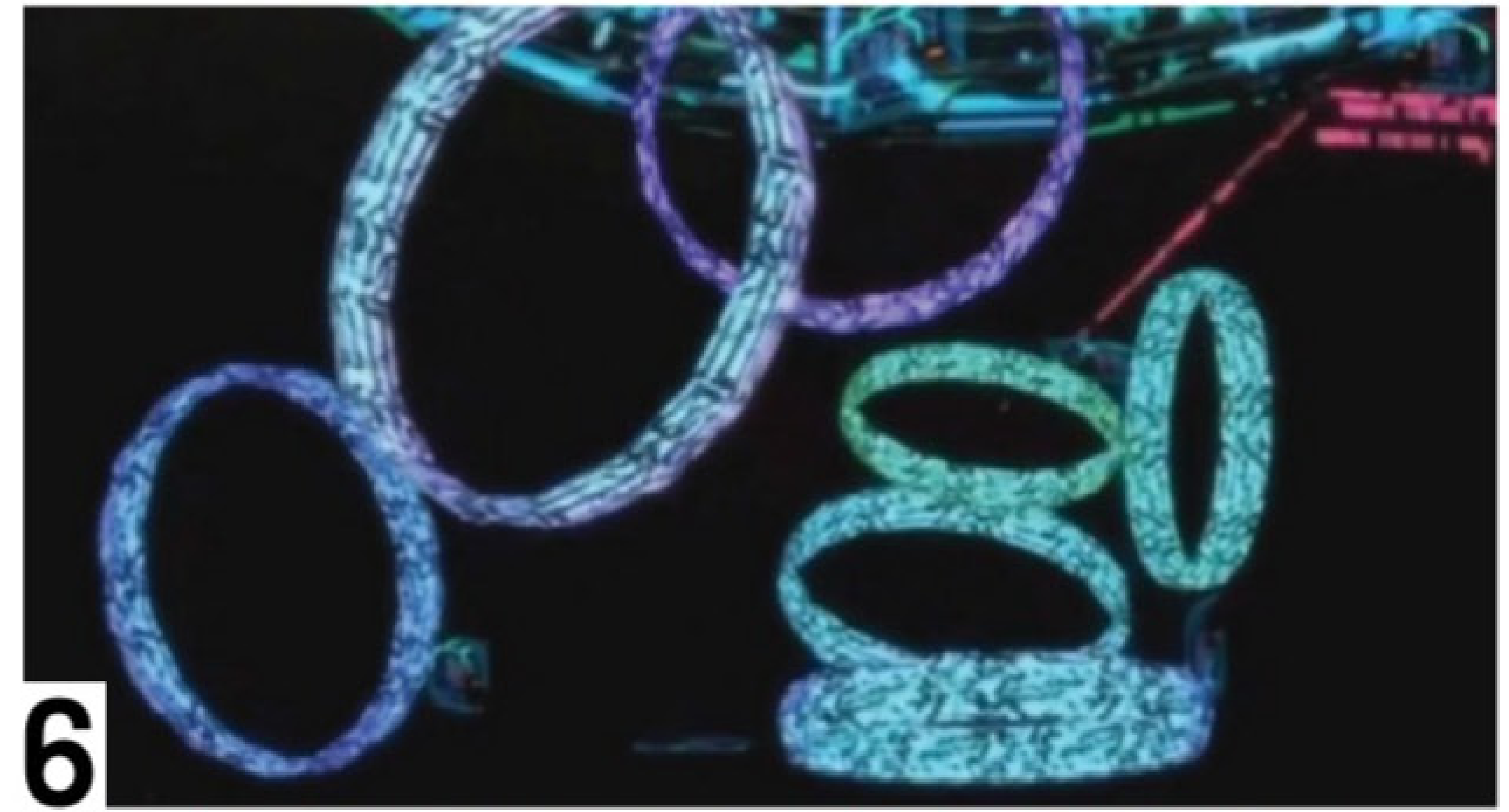
I HAVE WON.

Oh, and your poet Eliot had it all wrong:
THIS is the way the world ends.

5

THE MAIN HALO PLOT WAS TEASED BACK IN 1998…

DURING DEVELOPMENT, BUNGIE sent out a series of emails to notable members of the *Marathon* community that were supposedly written by an AI calling herself 'Cortana'. This teased a race of alien zealots that 'worshipped at the altar of orbital bombardment', an 'unbroken ring' with no creators and a 'humourless war machine' that occupied the same digital space.



6

…AND MORE HALO GAMES WERE TEASED AT THE END OF HALO: CE

IN THE CONTROL room of Installation 04, you can make out not only the Halo ring that you're standing on, but six other structures, too. This ties into the main storyline – if any Halo failsafe is activated, then detonation of the structures can only be achieved from Installation 00: the Arc (where later games eventually end up taking you).



7

CORTANA HAS A HUMAN 'SOUL'

NOT STRICTLY REVEALED in the first game, but retrospectively looking at Cortana as something other than an AI is… unsettling. Cortana came to be after being illegally reverse engineered from a clone of her scientist creator (Dr Halsey) – the same woman behind the creation of the original Spartans.



8

HALO BLEW UP BUNGIE'S DEMO COMPUTER

ON ITS FIRST European press tour, Bungie was demoing *Halo* when the system they were running it on went up in smoke. Whether it was because the game was so powerful that it fried the engine or the demo machine was just a little rusty we'll never know.



9

HALO BEGAN ITS LIFE AS AN RTS

EARLY TECH DEMOS of the game – complete with a revealing voiceover from the developers – indicate that the original *Halo* game was intended to be a God-view RTS in the style of the likes of *Command & Conquer* that saw the player assuming control of groups of marines. Moreover, it takes place in a world that closely resembles the planet you play through in the final build.



10

THE ART DIRECTOR IS IN THE GAME (WELL, SPIRITUALLY)

MARCUS R LEHTO – creative art director and senior employee at Bungie, who designed the vast majority of the stalwart *Halo* imagery – has various tributes sprinkled throughout the game: his initials are located on the underside of Master Chief's boot, and his birthday is the Scorpion tank's serial number (030569).

THE RETRO GUIDE TO...

SHIGERU MIYAMOTO



Shigeru Miyamoto is gaming's most acclaimed developer, having created some of the industry's most recognisable characters and franchises. Join **games™** as we celebrate the many notable works of a gaming legend

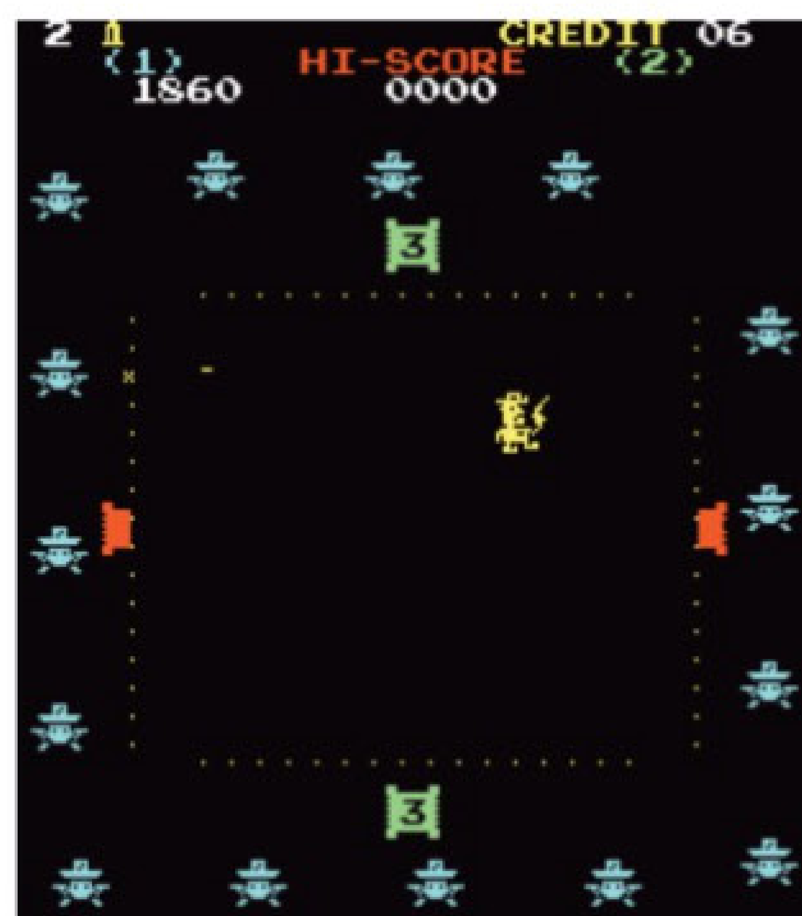
FEW GAMING CELEBRITIES are as well known as Shigeru Miyamoto. He may not be as headline-grabbing as Hideo Kojima, or as talkative as Peter Molyneux, but it doesn't matter. He's been instrumental to the success of Nintendo for over 30 years and is the genius behind some of gaming's biggest and most important franchises. *Donkey Kong*, *Mario* and *Zelda* are just a few of the iconic characters to came from his fevered imagination, while his infectious enthusiasm and genuine love of games is impossible to ignore.

Miyamoto started off at Nintendo as a simple apprentice. He soon progressed to an artist's role and began work on early arcade games like *Sheriff*. He then stepped into design, contributing to *Radar Scope*, before coming up with the concept for the massively popular *Donkey Kong*. *Mario Bros* and various other arcade games followed, until Miyamoto left the arcade division and started working exclusively on Nintendo's various home consoles and handhelds.

A keen banjo player, gardener and cyclist, many of Miyamoto's hobbies have formed the basis of some of his biggest games – Zelda stemmed from his love of exploring, for example – and he's now one of Nintendo's biggest assets, currently presiding over Nintendo's Entertainment Analysis and Development branch as its general manager.

While he's not as hands-on with projects as he was in Nintendo's early days, his role as a producer and his sheer knack of knowing when a game is in need of fixing has allowed him to maintain an excellent track record that few other game developers can match. He's normally the man Nintendo turns to when they want to make the biggest impact with unveilings of new games and hardware, and it's telling that Nintendo's shares dropped by two per cent when a translated interview suggested he would be retiring. While he confirms that he still has a few more years in him, it's inevitable that the 60-year-old can't keep making games forever. Or can he?

That's something only Miyamoto can decide. Until then, let's look back at some of his best and most interesting games. Games that have often shaped the industry as we currently know it.



SHERIFF 1979

SYSTEM: ARCADE
ROLE: DESIGNER

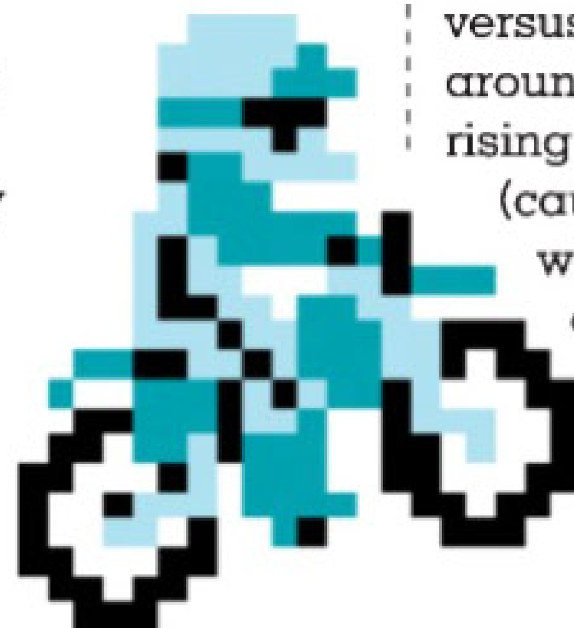
■ Shigeru Miyamoto's first game plays like a cross between *Space Invaders* and *Gun Fight* and sees your titular sheriff shooting at bad guys as they shuffle around the outside of the screen. While it features a joystick for moving and an additional one for firing, it's a lot more clunkier than the system that would later be popularised by *Robotron: 2084*.



RADAR SCOPE 1979

SYSTEM: ARCADE
ROLE: DESIGNER

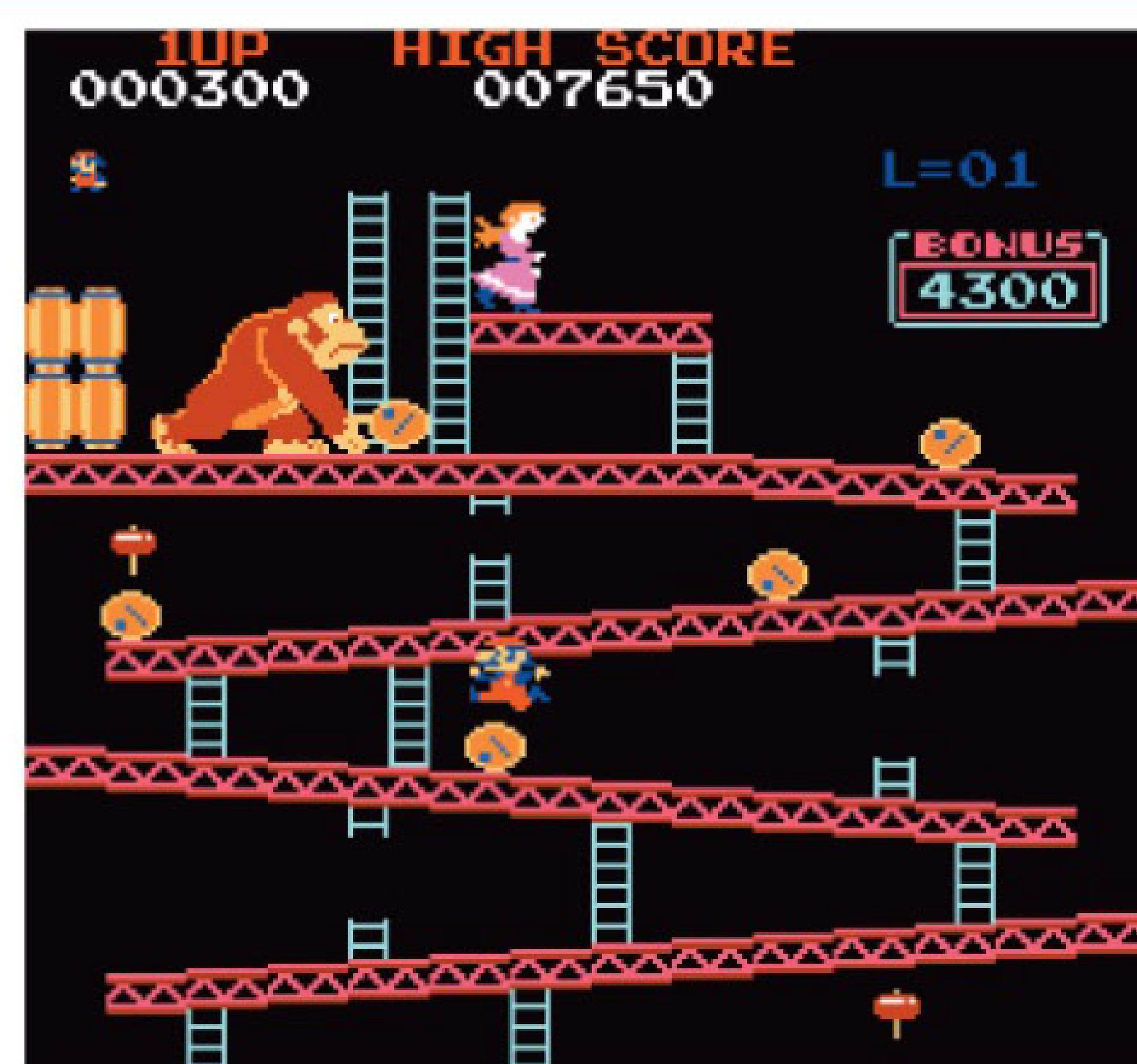
■ Play *Radar Scope* and you'd probably have no idea that it came from the now fertile mind of Shigeru Miyamoto. It's a perfectly serviceable take on *Space Invaders*, with an admittedly neat perspective that would later inspire gems like *Juno First*, but it's hardly earth shattering. Interestingly, what would come from *Radar Scope*'s innards would help change gaming forever.



DONKEY KONG 1980

SYSTEM: ARCADE **ROLE:** DESIGNER

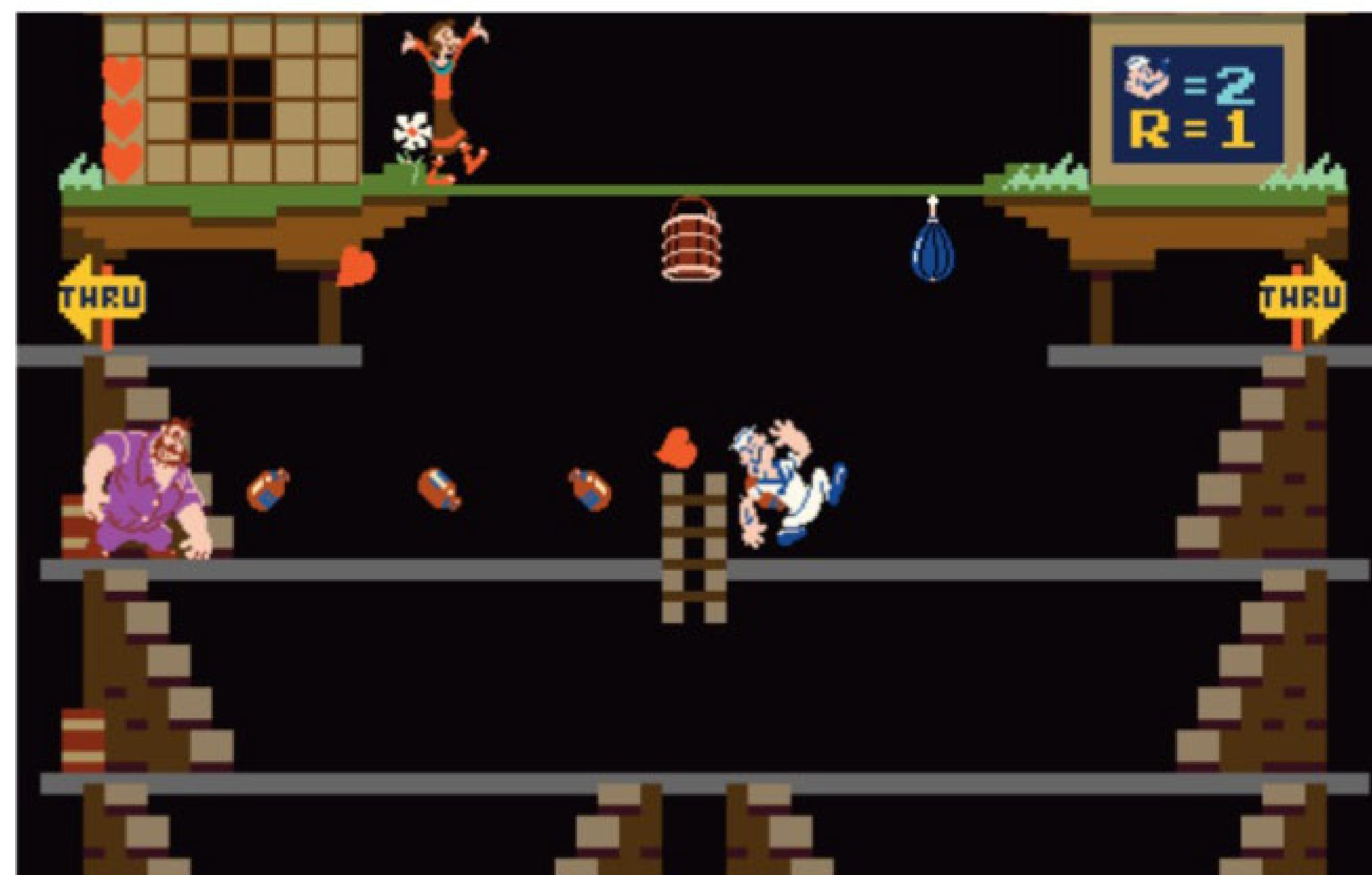
■ Although he came up the gameplay mechanics and iconic characters found in *Donkey Kong*, Shigeru Miyamoto didn't actually create this iconic game. Programming duties were instead handled by Ikegami Tsusjinki a Japanese manufacturer that's still going strong today that officially sued Nintendo in 1983 (the case was eventually settled out of court for an undisclosed amount). *Donkey Kong* helped redefine arcade gaming creating memorable characters, an actual story (unknown at the time) and new play mechanics like the ability to jump over gaps and objects. Both Donkey Kong and Jumpman (as Mario was then known) would go on to become massive stars, while the game itself would help change Nintendo's arcade fortunes in the West. A truly redefining videogame.

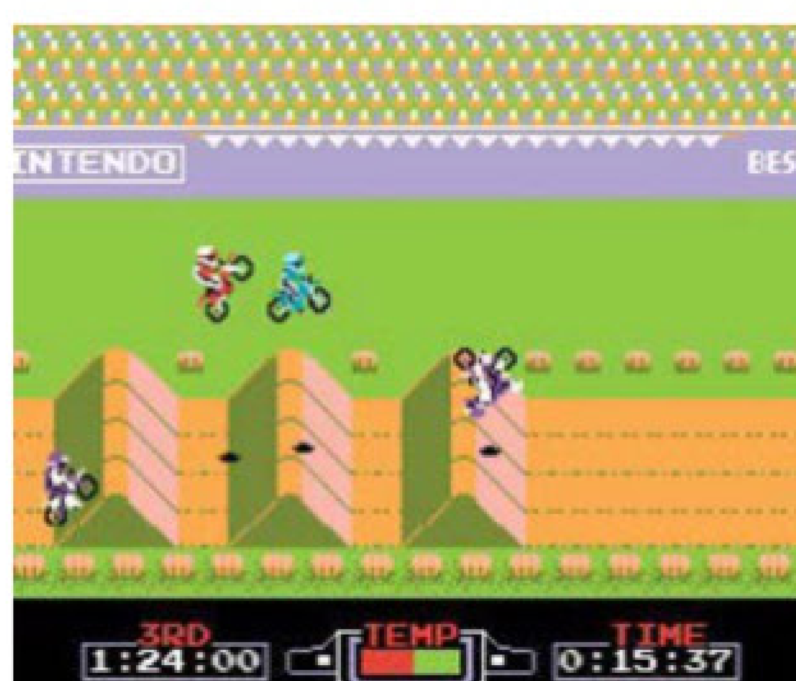


POPEYE 1982

SYSTEM: ARCADE
ROLE: DESIGNER

■ Another early offering from Miyamoto, and one of Nintendo's earliest games to feature a licence. In some ways it's a repeat of *Donkey Kong*, with Popeye and Brutus standing in for Jumpman and Donkey Kong. It's a fun, madcap chase around the four-tiered stage, with Popeye trying to collect a number of specific items whilst avoiding the clutches of Brutus and the Sea Hag. A fun platformer, full of deft little touches.





EXCITEBIKE 1982

SYSTEM: NES
ROLE: DESIGNER

■ Excellent racer from Miyamoto that allows you to tear around cleverly designed tracks on a dirt bike. It's notable for a neat risk versus reward system that revolves around increased acceleration rising the temperature of your bike (causing it to be immobilised while it cools down) and an excellent editing mode. It was succeeded in 2000 by the excellent *Excitebike 64*, and more recently, *Excitebike: World Rally* on WiiWare.

SUPER MARIO BROS 1985

SYSTEM: NES **ROLE:** DESIGNER, DIRECTOR

■ While Mario was already well known thanks to the likes of *Donkey Kong*, *Wrecking Crew* and *Mario Bros*, it was this delightful gem from 1985 that helped turn him into the global phenomenon he is today. *Super Mario Bros* had everything and would typify what people would expect from a Miyamoto game. The level design is ingenious; it's filled with all manner of secrets to uncover, while the gameplay mechanics are polished to perfection. It's shifted over 40 million copies since its release and has spawned numerous sequels, making it one of Miyamoto's most successful games.





THE LEGEND OF ZELDA 1986

SYSTEM: NES
ROLE: DESIGNER, DIRECTOR, PRODUCER

Stemming from Miyamoto's love of exploring, *Zelda* first made its debut on the Famicom Disk System before receiving a cartridge version a year later. While it's crushingly difficult at times, it features a host of hallmarks and key gameplay mechanics that would help turn the series into one of Nintendo's most popular franchises. *The Legend Of Zelda* offered a rich blend of exploration, combat and puzzle solving, which while not uncommon at the time, had rarely been done with such style or panache.



F-ZERO 1990

SYSTEM: SNES
ROLE: PRODUCER

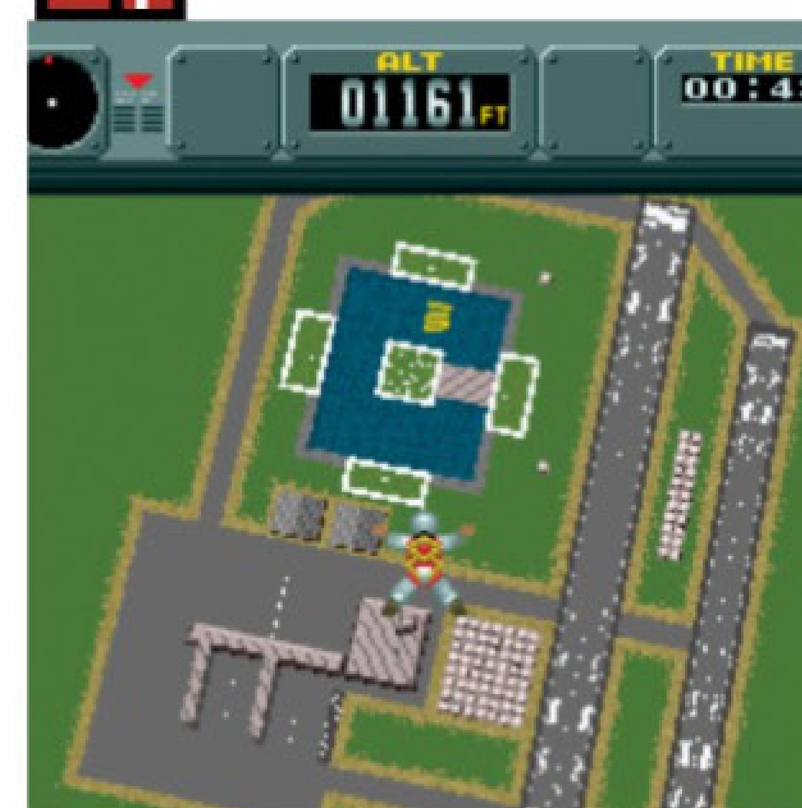
When *F-Zero* launched with the SNES in 1990, it felt like a revelation for those lucky enough to play it. While it wasn't the first futuristic racer of all time, its insane speed and super slick graphics ensured it was one of the few home racers that was able to match the sheer speed and polished visuals of popular arcade racers. While the lack of multiplayer grated, the masterfully designed tracks, superb Mode 7 visuals and excellent soundtrack soon made you forget Nintendo's rather glaring oversight.

SUPER MARIO BROS 3 1988

SYSTEM: NES **ROLE:** DIRECTOR

With the true *Super Mario Bros 2* being little more than a ridiculously harder version of the original game, it was down to Miyamoto's third *Super Mario Bros* release to help define the genre. It did so in style, introducing a host of characters and mechanics that would shape both the franchise and genre in general. The Hammer Bros, Koopalings and Tanooki suit are all introduced, while the excellent world map and numerous mini-games would crop up throughout the rest of the series. It became a massive success for Nintendo, helped in no small part by massive exposure in the Fred Savage-starring *The Wizard*, which was effectively a 100-minute advert for Nintendo and its products, including the ill-fated Power Glove.

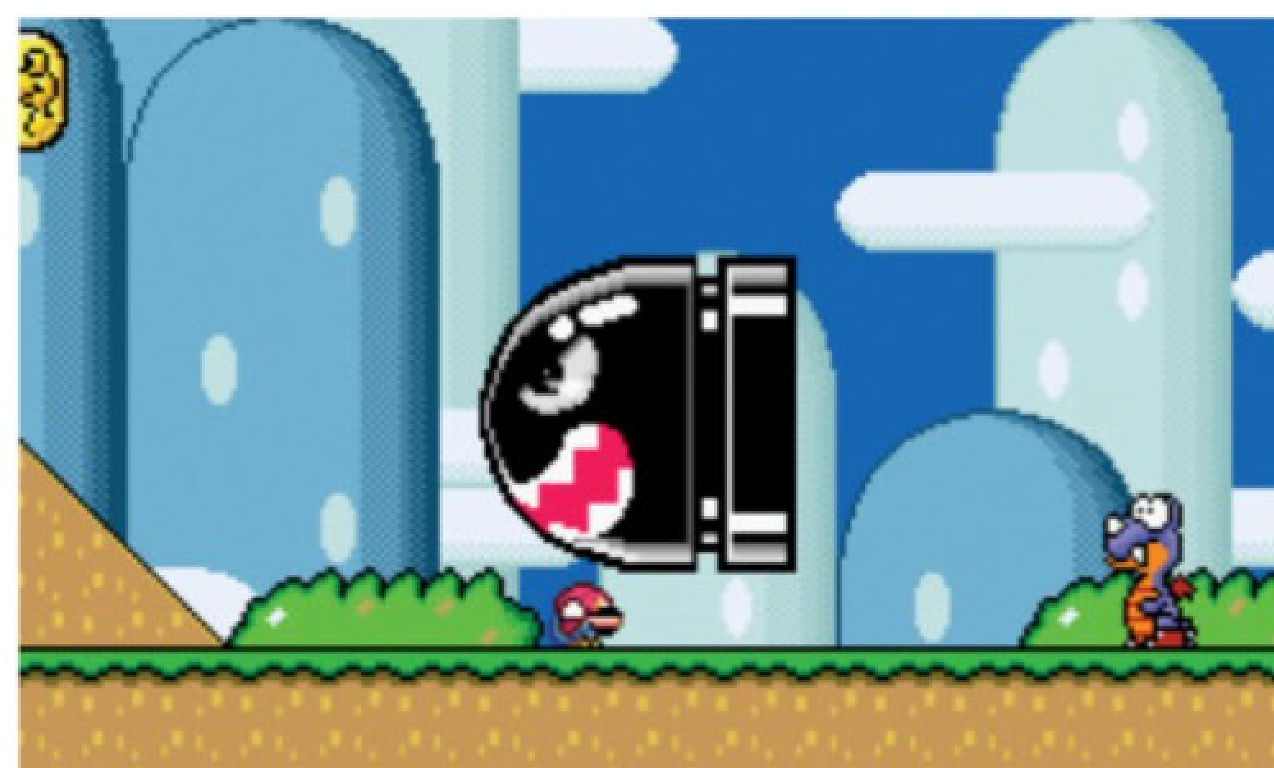




PILOTWINGS 1990

SYSTEM: SNES
ROLE: PRODUCER

A flight simulator is the last thing you'd expect from Nintendo, although *Pilotwings* proved to be anything but a traditional take on the genre. Powered by sensational Mode 7 visuals, *Pilotwings* dispenses with the traditional staid and boring control focus of part simulators to produce a far more enjoyable and lighter experience. The gamble worked, delivering a series of training sessions that became surprisingly complex as you graduated up the ranks. All your training is rewarded with you controlling a heavily armed attack helicopter in *Pilotwings*' final stage, but it's the sheer relaxation from simply flying around (particularly on the hang glider stages) that make it such a joy to play.



SUPER MARIO WORLD 1990

SYSTEM: SNES **ROLE:** PRODUCER

For many gamers this remains the best platformer of all time, and it's easy to see why. Virtually every aspect of *Super Mario World* is perfect, from its amazingly crafted levels, to the stunning sprite design. It may have been Miyamoto's first *Super Mario Bros* game where he wasn't in the director's chair, but you never would have thought it from the end result. It's quite simply the best platformer of all time, and one we'd love to see given a sparkling HD 2D makeover.

THE FRANCHISE MAKER

A quick rundown of the biggest franchises Miyamoto has been involved with

Donkey Kong



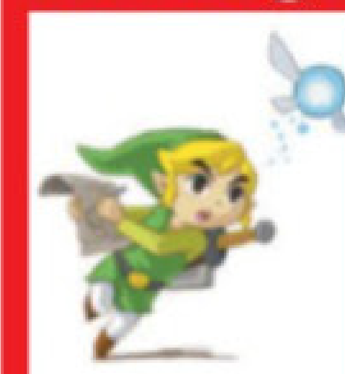
Miyamoto's breakout game featured two iconic characters: Donkey Kong and Jumpman, later known as Mario. The big primate has appeared in nearly 30 games across a variety of systems.

Super Mario Bros



The *Super Mario Bros* series started off on the Nintendo Entertainment System, and turned into one of Nintendo's most successful franchises. Mario has gone on to become the most recognisable videogame character of all time.

The Legend Of Zelda



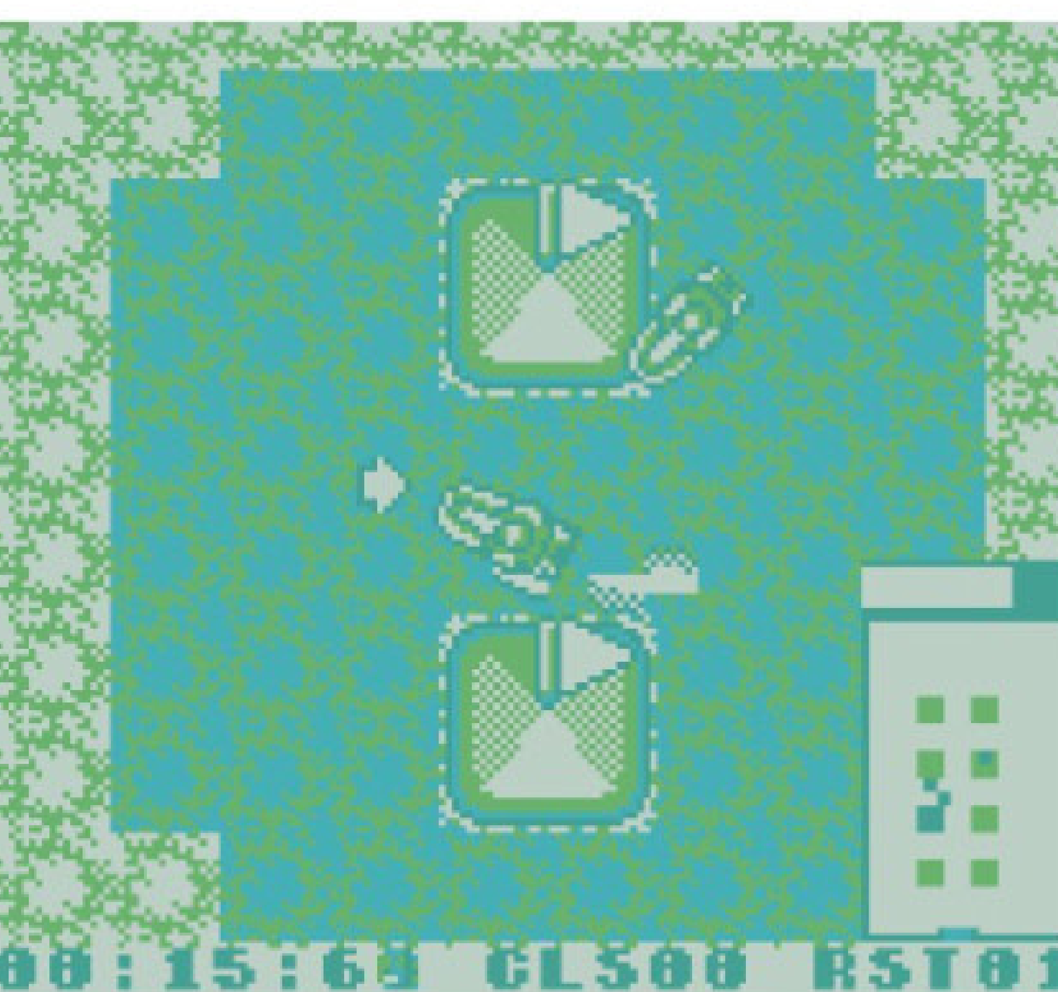
An excellent adventure series that continues to reinvent itself with each new instalment. *A Link Between Worlds* is the next original game and a direct sequel to SNES hit, *A Link To The Past.*



THE LEGEND OF ZELDA: A LINK TO THE PAST 1991

SYSTEM: SNES **ROLE:** PRODUCER

The magical moment when Link steps into the Dark World and discovers an alternative version of Hyrule to explore remains one of the best twists of any videogame. It's the icing on a particularly delicious slice of adventure cake that built upon the brilliance of the original *Zelda* and greatly expanded it to make the most of the SNES'S 16-bit capabilities. Bosses were bigger and more imaginative, and weapons were integrated exceptionally well into the game's devious dungeons, while the soundtrack was utterly sublime. Little wonder that it's taken Nintendo 22 years to create an actual sequel for it.



WAVE RACE 1991

SYSTEM: GAME BOY **ROLE:** PRODUCER

Nobody ever seems to remember this entertaining racer when we bring it up, believing the franchise first began with the N64 game. It's a pity, as *Wave Race* is a highly enjoyable racer that allows you to race up to three other friends (with the relevant link cable) across a variety of well-designed courses. Race mode is by far the most enjoyable, but the included Slalom mode offers a far tougher challenge.

SUPER MARIO KART 1992

SYSTEM: SNES **ROLE:** PRODUCER

The game that created a whole new sub-genre. Mario and pals took to the road to star in this highly charged racer that made amazing use of Mode 7. Fuelled by catchy tunes and a highly entertaining multiplayer mode (which was sadly two-player only), its highlight was the fantastic Time Trials that offered endless replay value. While it has received numerous sequels over the years, many still prefer the original.



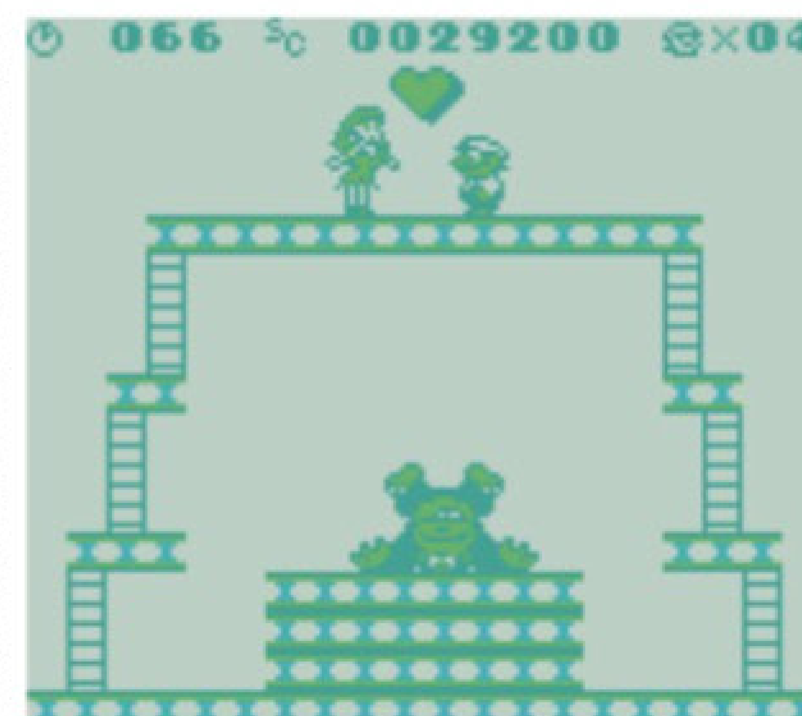


STAR FOX 1993

SYSTEM: SNES **ROLE:** PRODUCER

Star Fox was a collaboration between Jez San's Argonaut Software and Nintendo EAD. Argonaut had developed a prototype for the NES, and moved work to Nintendo's 16-bit console. The end result was a slick on-rails shooter that introduced the world to Fox McCloud and his anthropomorphic crew. A promotional version called the *Super Star Fox Weekend* (Official Competition) now fetches silly prices on eBay. Interestingly, *Star Fox* was renamed *Star Wing* in Europe due to a *Starfox* game (also set in space) being already available on 8-bit computers.





DONKEY KONG 1994

SYSTEM: GAME BOY **ROLE:** PRODUCER

While it's notable for being the first Game Boy game to take full advantage of the SNES's Super Game Boy, it's the stunning gameplay that makes this a classic. Initially you're under the impression you're playing a monochromatic version of the original game, albeit with new moves. Once those stages are completed, Donkey Kong reveals itself to be a platformer with a huge number of stages. Planned sequel *Donkey Kong Plus* resurfaced as *Mario Vs Donkey Kong* on the GBA a decade later.

F-Zero



An excellent racing series that introduced Captain Falcon and has received ten sequels and add-ons since its 1990 inception. Frustratingly, there are no plans for a new game, despite the 3DS being the perfect system for it.

Pilotwings



One of Miyamoto's smallest franchises, with just three games in the series. It's a real shame that Nintendo does little with it, as the 3DS outing proved to be a particularly enjoyable (if all too brief) game.

Super Mario Kart



An extremely popular racing game that created a brand new sub-genre and is now on its seventh instalment. *Mario Kart 8*, due next year, looks set to feature anti-gravity elements, which should placate *F-Zero* fans.

Wave Race



Another smaller series that is wheeled out every few years. The franchise has lain dormant since *Wave Race: Blue Storm*, a GameCube launch game, meaning we're well overdue for a new offering.



SUPER MARIO 64 1996

SYSTEM: N64 **ROLE:** DIRECTOR, PRODUCER

After redefining the 2D platformer with *Super Mario Bros* in 1985, Miyamoto did the same thing for 3D 11 years later. Everything about *Super Mario 64* was a triumph. Its level design is exceptional; the 3D camera rarely intrudes, while the range of varied stages ensures you're never bored. Racing penguins, exploring sunken ships or outrunning turtles ensures Mario's adventure is never dull, while the imaginatively designed levels Mario visited made virtually every 3D platformer that came after it feel incredibly dated. An amazing achievement that still holds up as an exceptional example of the genre today.

POKÉMON RED AND BLUE 1996

SYSTEM: GAME BOY
ROLE: PRODUCER

Known as *Pocket Monsters* in Japan, Game Freak's game is stupidly successful, and has become one of the biggest videogame franchises of all time. While the gameplay is relatively straightforward, the goal of trying to capture all 151 different Pokémon makes it frightfully addictive. Its latest instalment, *Pokémon X & Y*, is due to be released later this month.

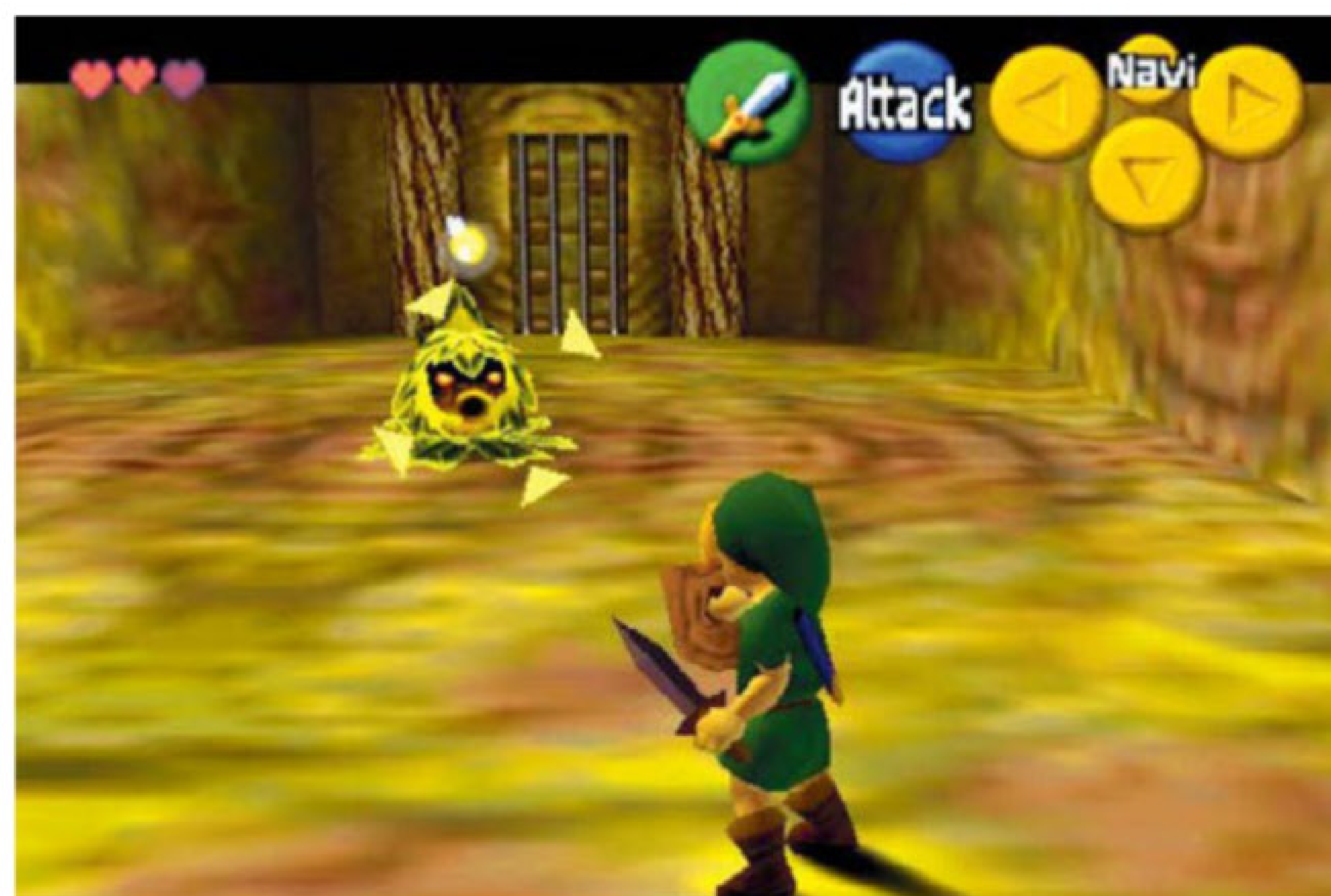




PILOTWINGS 64 1996

SYSTEM: N64
ROLE: DESIGNER

Pilotwings 64 launched alongside *Super Mario 64*, and while it wasn't as genre defining as its groundbreaking peer, it still proved to be an essential game. Although the N64's second launch game was farmed out to American developer Paradigm Entertainment, there were still plenty of neat little touches to it that left you in no doubt of Miyamoto's involvement. The 3D has aged a little now, but it still remains a highly enjoyable simulator.



THE LEGEND OF ZELDA: OCARINA OF TIME 1998

SYSTEM: N64 **ROLE:** DESIGNER, DIRECTOR, PRODUCER

This is quite simply the best *Zelda* game ever made. Just like Mario before him, Link's first steps into 3D created an impossibly high bar that all future 3D adventures would be judged by. Stepping onto Hyrule Field for the first time remains one of the best moments of any videogame, while the imaginative bosses and clever dungeon designs have rarely been bettered by anyone, including Nintendo themselves. The land of Hyrule has never been as tantalising to explore as it was in *Ocarina Of Time*, while the well-crafted gameplay and expertly paced story created a template for all similar games to follow. While it has been repackaged numerous times in the intervening years, it's the incredibly polished 3D remake by Nintendo EAD and Grezzo that should be considered the definitive version of Miyamoto's masterpiece.

Star Fox



Another series that doesn't get the updates it deserves. *Star Fox 64* remains the jewel in the crown (with a 3DS update), but the last game, *Star Fox Command*, is now seven years old.

Pokémon



Starting off on the Game Boy, *Pokémon* has turned into a gaming phenomenon, and is the second-biggest games franchise after *Mario*. It has spawned countless sequels and a number of spin-offs.

Mario Party



An interesting collaboration with Hudson Soft that combines mini-games with the layout of a board game. It isn't perfect, but it did try to reinvent itself in subsequent console entries.

Super Smash Bros



A *Smash Bros* game has appeared on every home system since the N64. *Super Mario Bros For 3DS* will mark its handheld debut.

Paper Mario



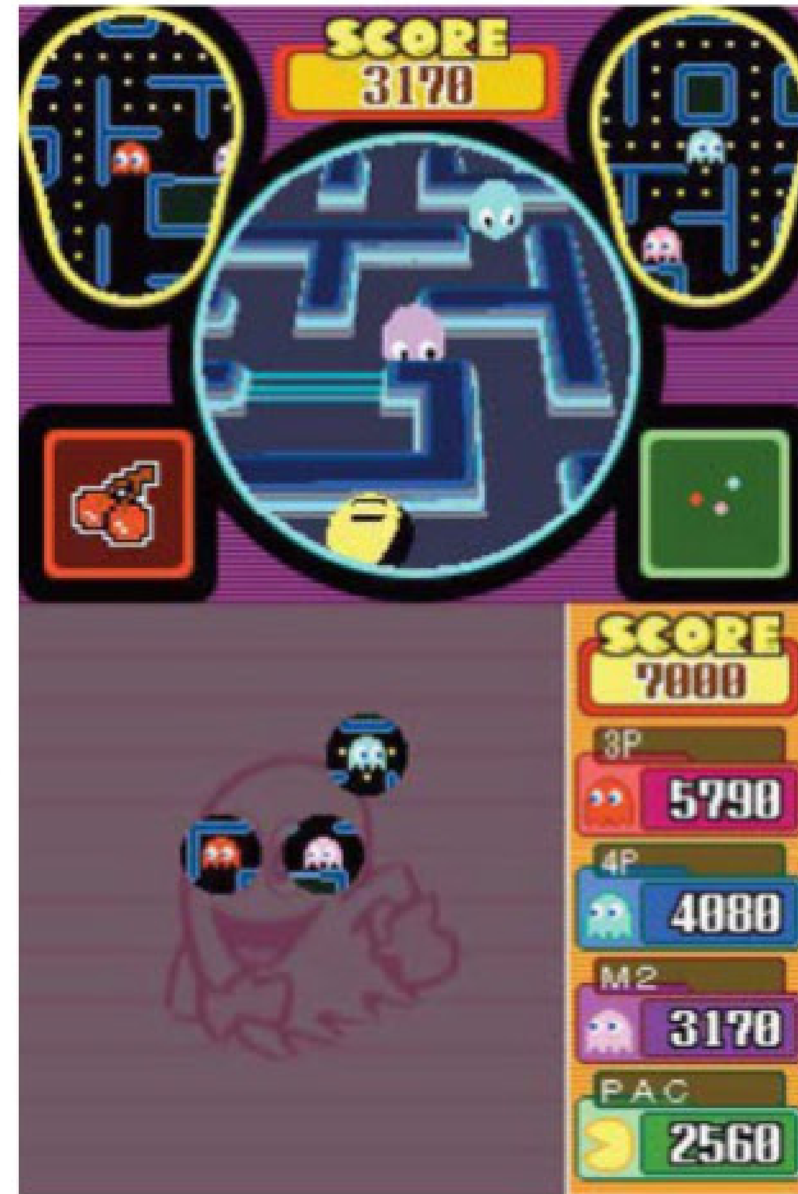
An enjoyable light RPG series where all the characters are paper thin. It is mainly handled by Intelligent Systems and includes four games.



SUPER SMASH BROS 1999

SYSTEM: N64
ROLE: PRODUCER

Trust Nintendo to take a traditional genre and add a new spin. *Smash Bros* saw Nintendo's biggest stars do battle by focusing on hectic brawling and crazy power-ups. The mechanics are surprisingly deep, while the roster has expanded over the years to include everyone from Sonic and Solid Snake in *Super Smash Bros Brawl* to Mega Man in next year's Wii U and 3DS outings.



PAC-MAN VS 2003

SYSTEM: GAMECUBE
ROLE: DESIGNER, PRODUCER

Shigeru Miyamoto occasionally likes to dabble with the IP of other companies. One of his best collaborations is this brilliant take on *Pac-Man*, which was packaged with numerous other games, including *R: Racing Evolution*, *I-Ninja* and *Pac-Man World 2*. One player as Pac-Man uses the Game Boy Advance, while up to four friends can control his ghost adversaries. It's a fantastic game of cat-and-mouse that later appeared on *Namco's Museum Collection* for the DS.

"ONE OF MIYAMOTO'S BEST COLLABORATIONS IS PAC-MAN VS, WHICH WAS PACKAGED WITH NUMEROUS OTHER GAMES"

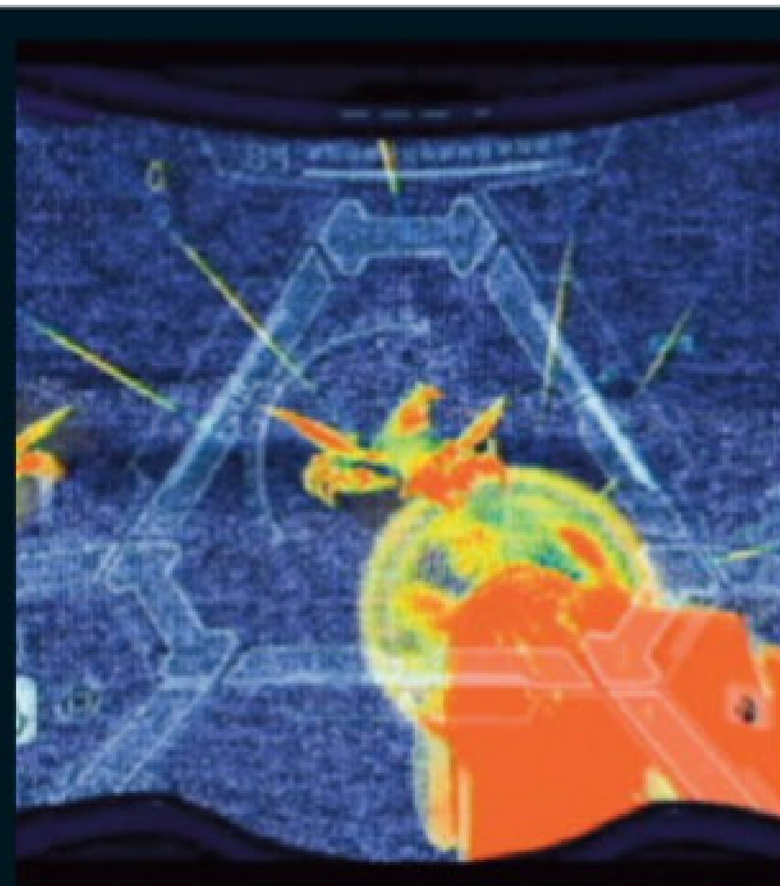


NINTENDOGS 2005

SYSTEM: DS
ROLE: PRODUCER

Trust Miyamoto to come up with a concept of making you walk a dog and have it be anything but boring. *Nintendogs* is a virtual life sim, but one where you can't let your cute puppy die (believe us, we've tried). It's admittedly light on substance, but there's something strangely endearing about caring for your digital furball. Its 3DS sequel added equally cute felines in 2011.



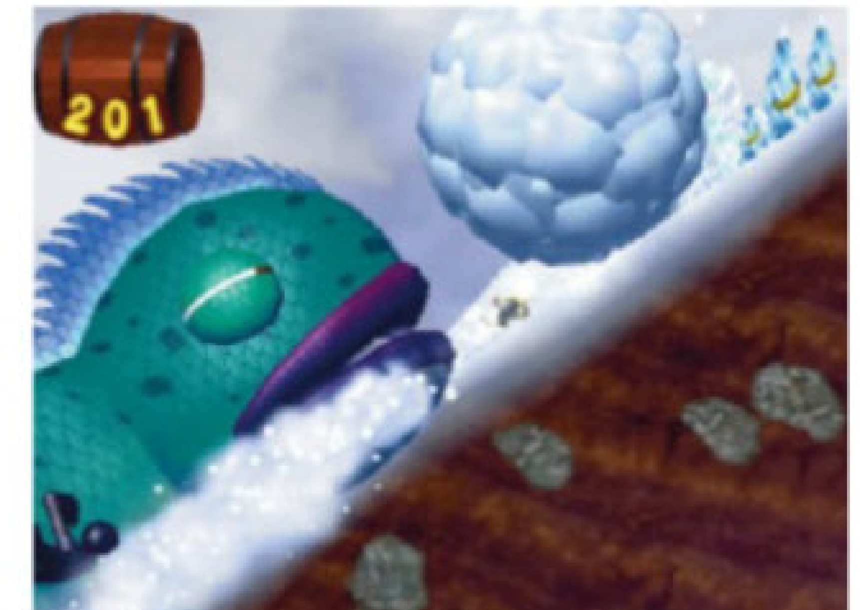


METROID PRIME 2002

SYSTEM: GAMECUBE **ROLE:** PRODUCER

Retro Studios went through a lot of heartbreak with its first *Metroid* game, with Miyamoto demanding it shift to a first-person perspective after he became unhappy with the third-person game the studio was working on. While the deadline was insane, the pay-off was easily worth it, with the studio delivering an incredible adventure that *felt* like the *Metroids* of old despite the brand new viewpoint. Its sequel, *Metroid Prime: Echoes*, was something of a disappointment thanks to a highly trumpeted multiplayer mode that was distinctly average, but Retro Studios once again pulled out the stops for *Metroid Prime: Corruption* on Wii.





DONKEY KONG: JUNGLE BEAT 2004

SYSTEM: GAMECUBE **ROLE:** PRODUCER

A highly innovative platformer that was built around the GameCube's DK Bongos. By hitting the bongos and clapping your hands, Donkey Kong jumps, punches and counterattacks his way through a variety of glorious-looking environments. The boss battles are fast and frantic, while the innovative combo system will please those with a love of score-attack games. A Wii version was released in 2008 with additional and modified levels.

Metroid Prime

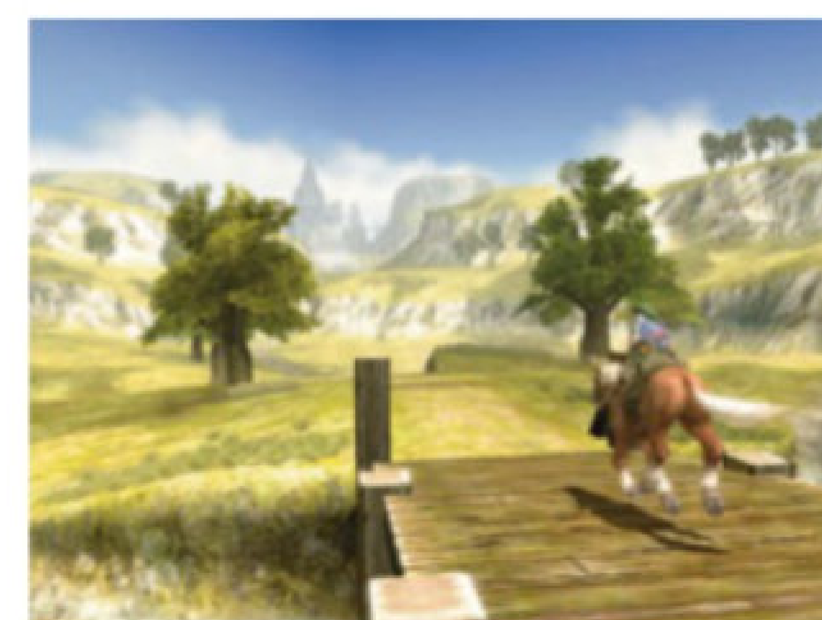


An offshot of the main *Metroid* franchise, *Metroid Prime* features five main games. There are three adventures spread across the GameCube and Wii, and *Metroid Prime Hunters* and *Metroid Prime Pinball* for Nintendo DS.

Pikmin



Pikmin is one of Miyamoto's most recent series, having first appeared on the GameCube in 2001. It's a charming spin on the RTS genre, and received a superior sequel, also on GameCube, in 2004.

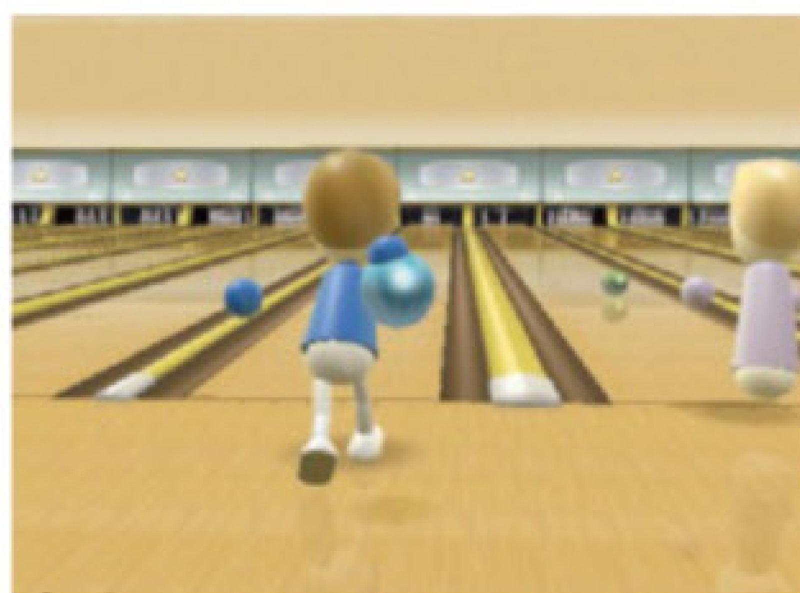




THE LEGEND OF ZELDA: TWILIGHT PRINCESS 2006

SYSTEM: GAMECUBE/WII **ROLE:** PRODUCER

Some were disappointed that this was effectively a re-skinned *Ocarina Of Time*, but that would be missing the point. It's another superb adventure yarn, delivering plenty of exceptionally well-designed dungeons and memorable characters. We'll go on record to say that while it lacks the aesthetic presentation of its Wii counterpart, the controls on the GameCube version are much better.



WII SPORTS 2006

SYSTEM: WII
ROLE: PRODUCER

Wii Sports may have been simplistic – it's essentially a tech demo – but it was pivotal in introducing a whole generation of non-gamers to Nintendo's brand new console. Tennis and Bowling were arguably the best of the five games on offer, but all provided plenty of fun. The 2009 sequel *Wii Sports Resort* is far superior.



SUPER MARIO GALAXY 2007

SYSTEM: WII
ROLE: DESIGNER, PRODUCER

While *Super Mario Sunshine* tried to capture the 3D brilliance of *Super Mario 64*, it was *Super Mario Galaxy* that really upped the ante for 3D platforming. It remains a truly astonishing platformer, full of creativity and clever suits for Mario that really take the genre in fresh and exciting directions. While the sequel improves on the original in several ways (including the introduction of Yoshi), it's the sheer impact of the original that ensures its inclusion here.



WII FIT 2007

SYSTEM: WII **ROLE:** DESIGNER

Miyamoto and Nintendo made exercise fun for the masses. Utilising the Balance Board, players take part in a host of exercises that ranges from running laps around Wuhu Island, using a hula hoop and participating in Rhythm Boxing. The presentation throughout is faultless, while the clever use of Achievements does give you a surprising amount of motivation to try and lose weight. Finally, an excellent selection of yoga exercises helped make the game appeal to female gamers. The Wii's balance board was dragged out for *Wii Fit Plus* two years later, and is due to make its Wii U debut at the end of this year.

THE LEGEND OF ZELDA: SKYWARD SWORD 2011

SYSTEM: WII **ROLE:** GENERAL PRODUCER

Some say that *Skyward Sword* is better than *Ocarina Of Time*. We're not sure if we'd agree, but it's a huge step forward for the series thanks to its excellent motion+ controls, dynamic boss encounters and clever inventory system that really makes you think about what items you take into the beautifully designed levels. It's unclear when the next proper new *Zelda* game will arrive on Wii U, but it's certainly going to have its work cut out to improve upon this masterful adventure.





STEEL DIVER 2011

SYSTEM: 3DS **ROLE:** DESIGNER

Steel Diver is notable for being one of Miyamoto's most recently designed games. Unfortunately, it's a pretty dull one, failing to capture the simulation aspects that made the *Pilotwings* games so enjoyable to play. It's simply too plodding for its own good, and was in development for years (it was first shown in 2004) before Miyamoto and his team finally completed it. Interestingly, a new version will become Nintendo's first free-to-play game, although it's currently unclear when this will be and for what system.



NEW SUPER MARIO BROS U 2012

SYSTEM: WII U
ROLE: GENERAL PRODUCER

While Mario's first Wii U outing was highly entertaining, there's a definite sense that the *New Super Mario Bros* series is beginning to feel a little too safe. It's basically Mario-by-numbers, rarely trying anything new and content on being a completely solid platformer and absolutely nothing more. Of course, any Mario game is usually leaps and bounds ahead of the competition, but we want to see a little more imagination from the moustachioed plumber.



WII MUSIC 2008

SYSTEM: WII **ROLE:** DESIGNER, PRODUCER

Despite the success of rhythm action games at the time, Miyamoto's contribution to the genre was surprisingly lacklustre. This was mainly down to the over-reliance of public domain music that ranged from *Happy Birthday To You* to *La Bamba*. More disappointing, however, was the sheer lack of actual Nintendo compositions, which clocked in at just eight tracks. The game's overall simplicity was the final straw for fans of the genre, and while it was certainly accessible, it just didn't hold your attention span.



NINTENDO LAND 2012

SYSTEM: WII U
ROLE: GENERAL PRODUCER

■ This Wii U launch games remains an interesting collection of hits and misses. Games like *Mario Chase* and *Luigi's Ghost Mansion* are utterly superb, but others like *Takamaru's Ninja Castle* are completely throwaway. It's a great game for parties, but you'll find little to keep you going if playing by yourself.



LUIGI'S MANSION: DARK MOON 2013

SYSTEM: 3DS
ROLE: PRODUCER

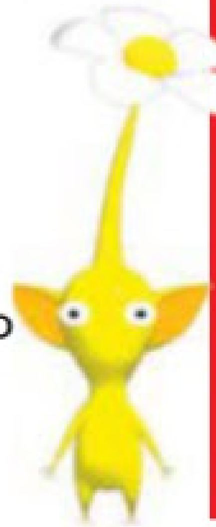
■ While the original *Luigi's Mansion* was great fun, this is a far better effort. There's far more to do for a start, while the 3D technology (which was first tested on the original GameCube game, no less) works fantastically well. Imaginative boss fights, a highly spooky atmosphere and delightful music all combine to create a far superior sequel.



PIKMIN 3 2013

SYSTEM: WII U
ROLE: GENERAL PRODUCER

■ While it doesn't enhance the series like *Pikmin 2* did, it remains a supremely compelling game that introduces a third playable character and several new Pikmin. It looks glorious too, with an enchanting world we'd love to live in. In fact, we're heading to the bottom of our garden to see if it actually exists.



SOFTOGRAPHY

Every available game that Shigeru Miyamoto has been involved with at Nintendo

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- DONKEY KONG JUNIOR (1982) ARCADE, DIRECTOR, DESIGNER
- **MARIO BROS (1983) ARCADE, DESIGNER**
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- LINK'S CROSSBOW TRAINING (2007) WII, PRODUCER
- **SUPER SMASH BROS BRAWL (2008) WII, SENIOR SUPERVISOR**
- MARIO KART WII (2008) WII, PRODUCER



- **PUNCH-OUT!! (2009) WII, PRODUCER**
- MARIO VS DONKEY KONG: MINIS MARCH AGAIN! (2009) NINTENDO DS, SUPERVISOR
- **NEW SUPER MARIO BROS WII (2009) WII, PRODUCER**
- SUPER MARIO GALAXY 2 (2010) WII, PRODUCER
- **DONKEY KONG COUNTRY RETURNS (2010) WII, SUPERVISOR**
- NINTENDOGS + CATS (2011) NINTENDO 3DS, DESIGNER
- **THE LEGEND OF ZELDA: OCARINA OF TIME 3D (2011) NINTENDO 3DS, PRODUCER**
- STAR FOX 64 3D (2011) NINTENDO 3DS, PRODUCER
- **SUPER MARIO 3D LAND (2011) NINTENDO 3DS, PRODUCER**
- MARIO KART 7 (2011) NINTENDO 3DS, PRODUCER
- **THE LEGEND OF ZELDA: THE WIND WAKER HD (2013) WII U, PRODUCER**

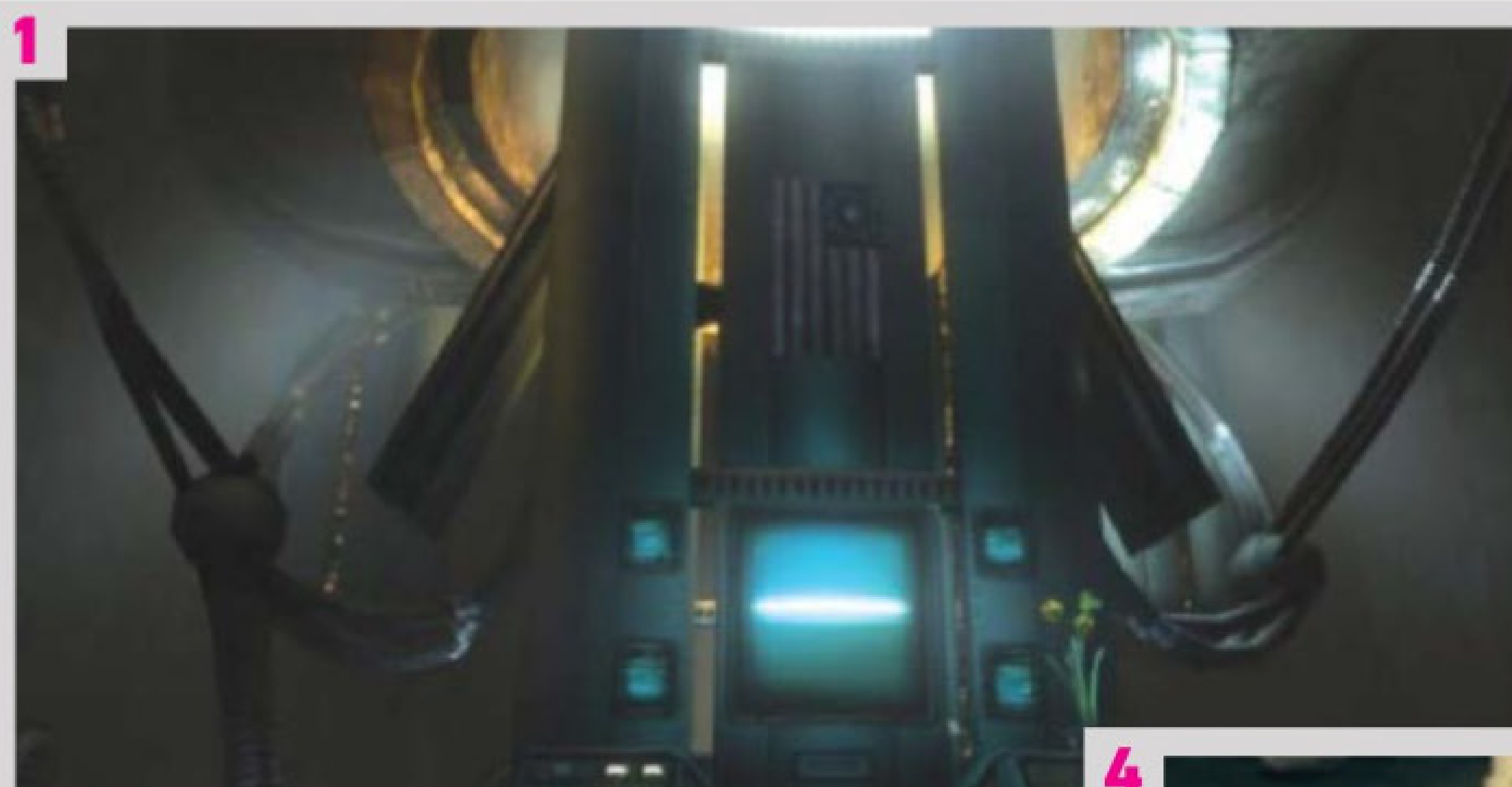
ESSENTIALS

10 OF THE MOST MISUNDERSTOOD VILLAINS

Nothing makes a game worth playing quite like a good villain. From epic boss battles to persistent antagonists, a villain tends to justify a game's story and give the hero a reason to fight on. But what about when all's not as it seems, and the big bad isn't as big and, well, bad, as you thought? Here, **games™** collects some of gaming's most misunderstood scoundrels...



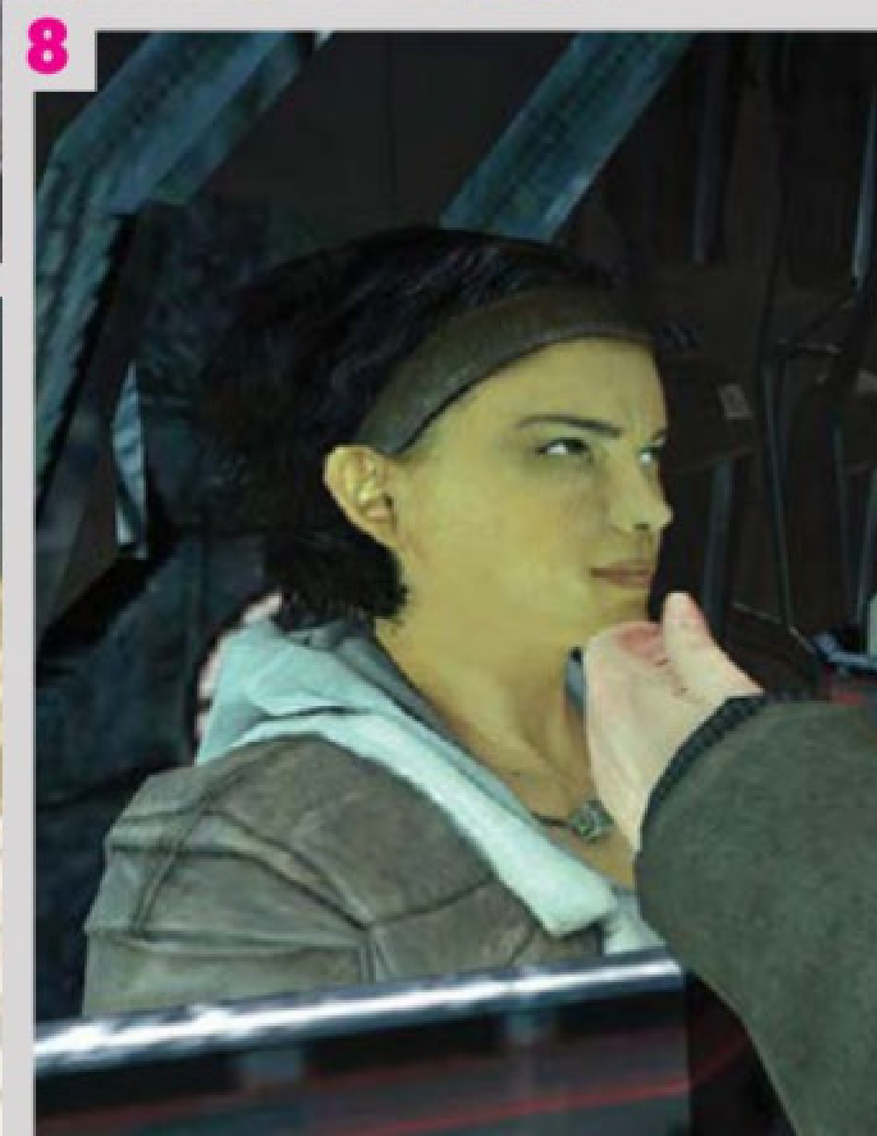
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President Eden
From: Fallout 3
Year: 2008

1 The overly patriotic supercomputer may have some, erm, 'interesting' views regarding mutants and their supposed corruption of his great American country, but his overall ideals are actually quite just: Eden only wants to return the US of A to its former glory – making it a better, safer and less radioactive place to live. Arguably, it's acceptable to purge a few muties for to meet those ends, right? Hmm. You can even persuade him to lay off his anti-Ghoul/Supermutant genocide if your speech skill is high enough, and there aren't a lot of evil supercomputers that would consider hearing you out like that.

Reptile
From: Mortal Kombat
Year: 1992

2 Usually painted as a villain within the *Mortal Kombat* universe, Reptile is one of the few bad guys who isn't questing for dominion over the world. As the lone survivor of his race – the Raptors – Reptile was promised by Shao Khan that his loyalty will eventually pay off and lead to the revival of his people. Reptile therefore continues to act as Khan's personal bodyguard. Of course, in a world where betrayal and murder are commonplace, this never happens, and Reptile ends up being just another pawn used by Khan and his cohort in their attempt to take over every *Mortal Kombat* world.

Saren
From: Mass Effect
Year: 2007

3 Saren is a sad example of what will happen if you let a quest for power go to your head. It's debatable that Saren isn't actually aware of any of the atrocities he commits – being under the influence of Sovereign (a brainwashing alien spaceship), he technically isn't accountable for the people he kills or the hideous experiments carried out under his command. The fact that he's so terrified by the prospect of being indoctrinated, and continually denies that he is under anything's influence, just makes you feel sorry for him (especially if you convince him to kill himself before the final boss fight).

N
From: Pokémon Black/White
Year: 2011

4 When you think about it, *Pokémon* is a pretty brutal game – you're effectively going out into the wild to capture peaceful creatures, stuff them into a ball and then make them fight each other. It's this kind of cruelty that N wishes to prevent; being able to speak to Pokémon, he's convinced that trainers are inherently abusive to their pocket-partners, and sets up Team Plasma in order to help 'liberate' Pokémon from their trainers. This is all turns out to be a façade orchestrated by his adoptive father Ghetsis, who is the real villain all along – wanting the power to use Pokémon all to himself.

Magus
From: Chrono Trigger
Year: 1995

5 In *Chrono Trigger*'s chaotic timeline, Magus is the Fiendlord back in 600 AD – head of an army intent on destroying humanity. However, when you scratch beneath the surface, you realise he's actually fighting to destroy Lavos – an alien parasite living beneath the planet that drove his mother mad (and killed his cat, which is unforgivable). It's actually Magus' trio of generals that are waging war on the humans, and Magus himself doesn't care about the war either way. His single-minded intent on taking down Lavos consumes him, and to this end you can even recruit him to your team.





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Wheatley
From: Portal 2
Year: 2011

6 While GLaDOS may be the most recognisable villain in the *Portal* series, Wheatley dishes out a fair amount of antagonism towards the player, too. Considering that Wheatley was created to be stupid in the first place – mainly in order to keep GLaDOS in check – you can't really hold it against him when GLaDOS turns him utterly insane and evil. Any misgivings that Wheatley has can also be forgiven after hearing his apology at the end of the game; floating through space, he laments to himself that he will never get the chance to apologise to Chell for everything he did. Aw.

Andrew Ryan
From: BioShock
Year: 2007

7 Andrew Ryan – while a little megalomaniacal – cannot be held up as an out-right villain. In building Rapture, he created a world that grew far too quickly for him to control. Despite being lauded as the big bad boss for most of the game's narrative, Ryan ultimately sacrifices himself to highlight the player character's indoctrination: it's Ryan that first lets you in on the 'would you kindly?' trigger, and to really drive the point home, he forces the player to forcibly beat him to death. When you consider that he was your father too, it's very difficult to feel any animosity whatsoever toward the poor man.

Dr Breen
From: Half-Life 2
Year: 2004

8 Okay, so Dr Breen may have sold out the entire human race to an alien species intent on turning us all into slaves, but he had good intentions for doing so. It's inferred in *Half-Life 2* that if Breen hadn't offered us all into perpetual servitude then we would have just been destroyed by the Combine altogether. He arguably settled for the lesser of two evils. If he was truly evil, he wouldn't have bothered trying to get the rebel leaders to surrender – he would have just outright killed them. He also genuinely believes that he's helping humanity evolve in a superior race, so that's something.

Jecht
From: Final Fantasy X
Year: 2001

9 Possibly one of the most morally grey characters in the *Final Fantasy* franchise, Jecht is an abusive, bullying pig of a father to protagonist Tidus. He is, however, a great blitzball player and a pretty snappy dresser. Jecht is pretty much the final boss of *Final Fantasy X*, but he never intended to be. In fact, years before the player's arrival in Spira, Jecht sacrificed his life to defeat world's biggest evil, Sin. Unknown to him at the time, however, doing this makes *you* Sin. So Jecht, completely against his wishes, travels around the world being forced to rain destruction unto everyone and everything.

Handsome Jack
From: Borderlands 2
Year: 2012

10 The CEO of Hyperion corporation, Handsome Jack has a *huge* ego that almost matches the size of the geostationary moon base he built himself. Yes, he did imprison his daughter and use her mystical powers for his own diabolical ends, and yes, he is an extortionist/serial-killer/kidnapper, but he did it all for the greater good of Pandora – which he claims could have been a paradise free of raiders, dangerous creatures and, presumably, you if he got his way. As it turns out, though, Handsome Jack was just another example of what happens if you let your ego get the better of you. Let that be a warning.

THE VAULT





PERSONA 4: THE ANIMATION BLU-RAY

STUDIO: **Manga Entertainment** PRICE: **£55 (set), £18 (each)**

IT'S NOT RARE for a game to spawn a TV series or film tie-in to run alongside the main franchise, but game adaptations are notoriously bad. Perhaps it's the removal of the player's agency, or perhaps it's the strict restrictions imposed on the world through showing it from a fixed perspective, but putting a game story onto the big or little screen usually just doesn't work. It's refreshing, then, to see *Persona 4: The Animation* achieve what other ties-in often don't.

The animation is smooth and beautifully bought to life with all the stylistic verve Atlus put into the original game, and the voice-acting (both English and Japanese) is very high quality. The series straddles a line between completely vanilla high-school shenanigans (a la the Social Link aspects of the game) and an introspective set of quests through a distorted TV world. The anime seems like half feel-good entertainment (there are some genuinely funny moments) and half social commentary; observing our obsession with TV media, the pressure of high school stresses and, darkest of all, the way we choose to deal with repressed emotions, ranging from denial to crippling depression. Uplifting. *Persona 4: The Animation* is a mature, dignified anime that takes you through the exact story of the original game, but does so in a way that makes it feel fresh and exciting all over again.

GAMING CLOTHING



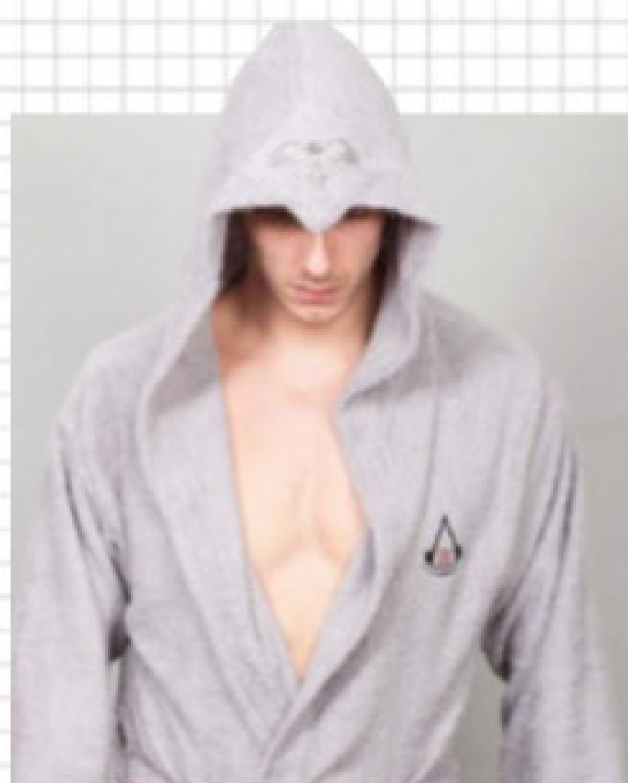
QUIT STARING AT MY CHEST BORDERLANDS SHIRT

This unisex shirt delivers a succinct message to would-be Vault raiders everywhere.
http://tinyurl.com/q6u95ok



MASS EFFECT N7 DRESS

Ever wanted to go out on the town hunting alien scum? Well, with Black Milk's N7 range, now you can!
http://tinyurl.com/n5c375h



EAGLE PEAK DRESSING GOWN

Even the world's deadliest assassins need to kick back and relax. Disclaimer: clothing doesn't come with a hidden blade.
http://tinyurl.com/9zvxh7r

FINAL FANTASY XIII: LIGHTNING'S GUNBLADE

MANUFACTURER: **DREAM2REALITY** PRICE: **$321.52**

WITH THE RELEASE of the third instalment of *Final Fantasy XIII* imminent, why not brush up on your gunblade-toting skills with a loyal replica of Lightning's trademark gunblade? Made from scratch by a professional cosplay prop shop in China, the gunblade is fully detachable and breaks down into its component parts. We're not sure you'll be able to slay behemoths with the sword, but we'll let that slide in respect of how pretty it looks.





MEGABLOKS HALO SERAPH

MANUFACTURER: **MEGABLOKS** PRICE: **£69.99**



IS THE WAIT for the next generation of *Halo* games getting you down? One way you could entertain yourself *and* get your creative juices flowing is by constructing your own Covenant spacecraft – the Seraph. The angelically-named inter-planetary vessel comes with a crew of three Elite pilots, too, so you can populate your craft once it's complete. Building with Megabloks may not make *Halo 5* come any quicker, but it's sure to keep the uberfan fire burning while you wait.

POKÉMON GYM BADGES

MANUFACTURER: **SANSHEE.COM** PRICE: **$24.99**

ANY TRAINER WORTH their salt has at least eight gym badges, right? Why not translate that achievement into the real world with these accurate replicas of the generation one badges, courtesy of Sanshee.com. Every generation of badges is available, too, if you'd prefer to show off your Sinnoh achievements rather than your Kanto ones, for example. Each generational set costs the same, and are available either with the pictured silver trim, or a fancy gold trim for an extra $5.



games™

MMO WORLDS

The essential guide to the online gaming universe

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Exploring the next chapters in the EverQuest saga, we take an in-depth look at both EverQuest Next and Landmark

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Jagex's Dean Ollive discusses stats and procrastination during his avatar evaluation

A Beginner's Guide To...

DCU ONLINE

Join the League of Batmen or just become a dire Deadpool clone with our entry level guide to Sony's MMO

REBUILDING NORRATH

EverQuest Next's user-generated future

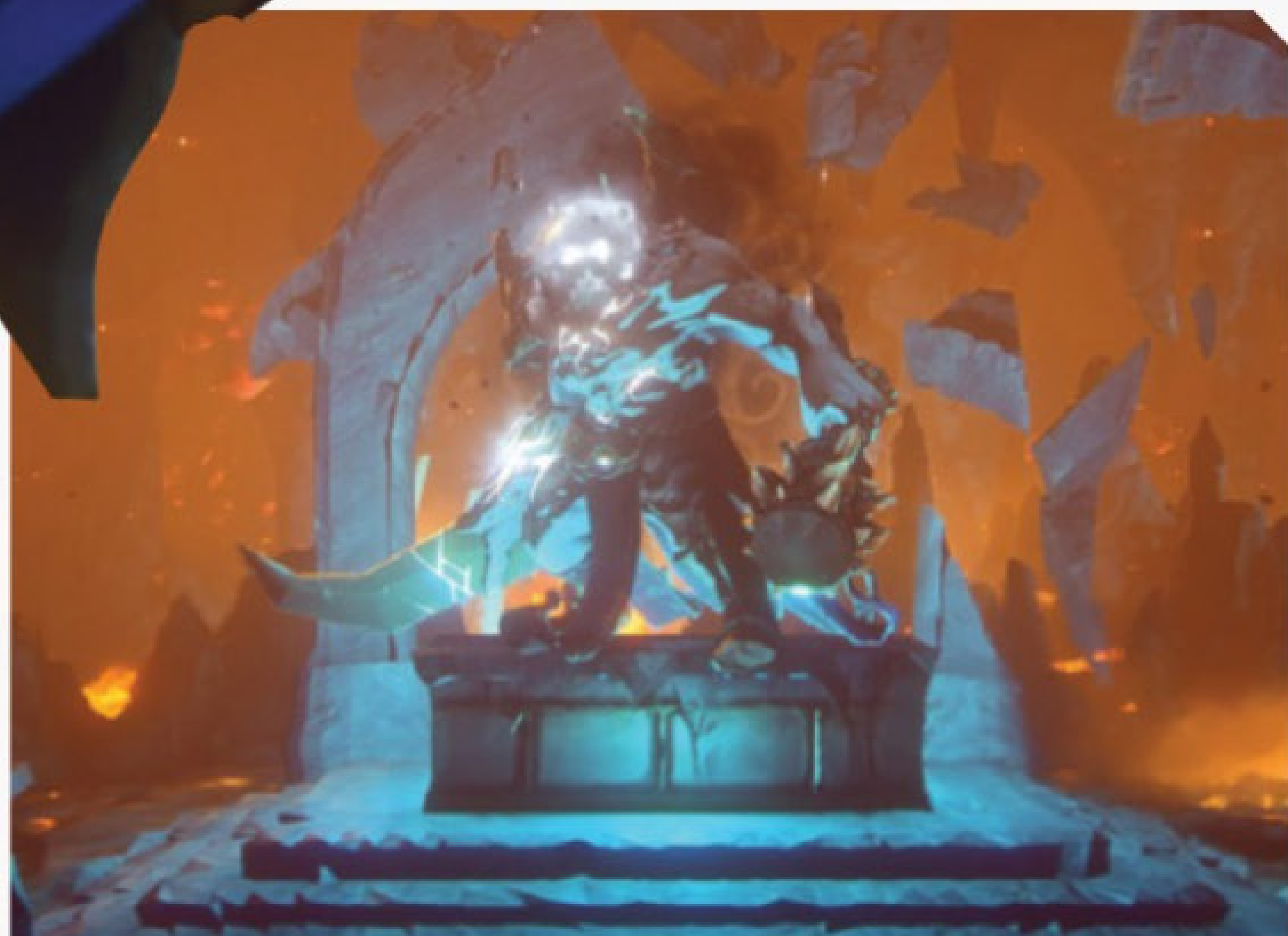
The original *EverQuest* suffered from what a lot of MMO players would say is a flaw intrinsic to the genre – a stilted world. The *EverQuest* universe felt like it never responded to a players' presence: it was more of a framework within which quests were set and missions granted than a legitimate, dynamic realm. Sony Online Entertainment is attempting to rectify this genre-wide criticism in its updated offering of *EverQuest Next*, and its companion release, *EverQuest Landmark*. Revealed to a reception of almost universal praise, the next steps in the *EverQuest* franchise promise to do what MMOs have promised to do for years – create a dynamic and engaging world that is both alive and ever-changing.

EVERQUEST LANDMARK

One way Sony is attempting to alter the MMO paradigm and deliver on this promise is by allowing players to generate their own content in the voxel-building companion *EverQuest Landmark*. Offered as an entirely separate game, *Landmark* is the construction facet of *EverQuest Next* – a portal in which players can edit the landscape that makes up the world of Norrath in a way that is heavily reminiscent of *Minecraft*. With a distinct sandbox aesthetic, *Landmark* was born from the idea that the ability to destroy the game world around you is just as fun as creating it.

Landmark works by having players venture onto one of Norrath's great continents, seeking out a plot of land to claim as a singular class – the Adventurer. Once obtained, you can grant permission for other players to edit on your site, if you so wish, allowing co-operative builds ideal for when you want to undertake some more ambitious building projects. *Landmark* promises to be a comprehensive world-building platform, with brush tools and smoothing options giving the player-architect complete control over what they're creating – whether you want to completely terraform the land and alter the continent's native geography, or build onwards and upwards from the ground itself, the world is literally yours to shape. The more experience you gain in generating content, the more tools become available to use, and the bigger your plot of land becomes.

If you want to show off your feats of construction to other players, the option exists to capture your achievements with a time-lapse tool built into the UI and then share it directly



Enemies such as the Void Goliath will also be able to destroy terrain to manoeuvre around barriers or defensive spells cast by friendly mages.



The updated graphics engine running *EverQuest Landmark* powers a defined cartoon style with a rich colour palette – a departure from the traditional realism of the series.

to YouTube. The attention to social features like these shows that Sony has its finger on the gaming community's pulse, and have learnt lessons demonstrated by the vibrant *Minecraft* community. Similarly to *Minecraft*, content creation is based on a resource system whereby the player must venture out to explore other users' creations (which they cannot edit, unless they have explicit permission from the land's owner) and harvest resources. Notably, resources are available to buy, too, and there are always 'super-common' construction materials like dirt on offer pretty much everywhere in Norrath. Should you want to add a something a little more personal to your masterpiece, though, you can find rare resources that can be utilised to make your project that little bit more unique.

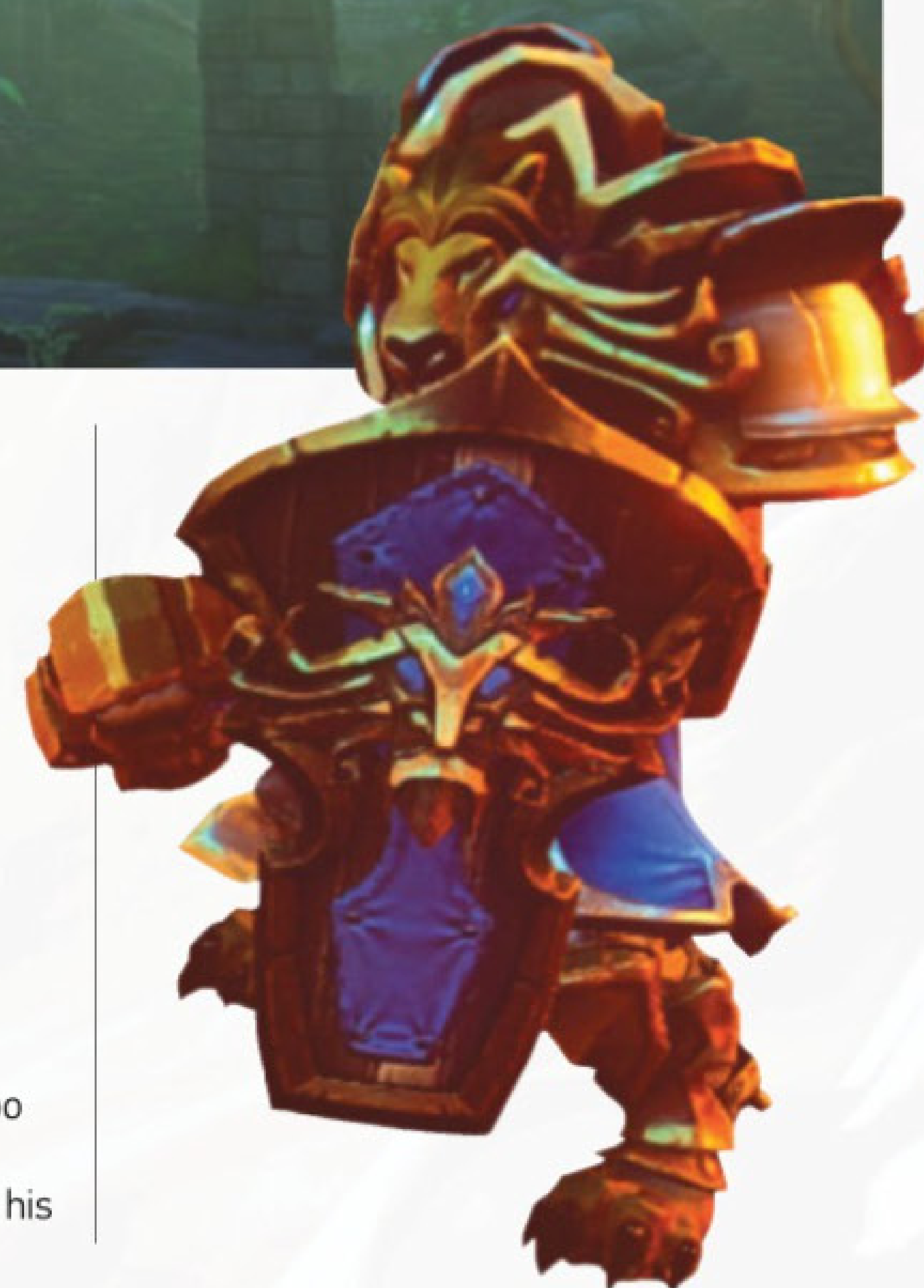
Should you ever get to a stage where you're happy with your project, you have the option to package up your content and offer it up to be sold on Sony Online Entertainment's Player Studio marketplace. The game seems geared in a direction that will create some kind of online real estate market, and Sony Online Entertainment have claimed they are keen for the marketplace component of the game to become a social hub where players can exchange, buy and sell properties. If all goes ahead as planned, we could see *EverQuest Landmark* as the industry's first ever fantasy real estate simulator.

"Landmark promises to be a comprehensive world-building platform, with brush tools and smoothing options giving the player-architect complete control over what they're creating"

Of course, an obvious problem with opening up a world like *Landmark* to an unedited audience of anonymous gamers is the prospect of having the game overrun with inappropriate/explicit content. The game's designers have promised deterrents are in place to fight that eventuality – including player reporting options and a reputation system that could potentially affect the profitability of your creations.



There are a variety of locales that can be customised in *EverQuest Landmark*.





This Earth Elemental isn't too happy about us trespassing near his crystals...

ALTERNATE REALITY

THE DEVELOPMENT team behind *EverQuest Landmark* have shown themselves working with the alternate-reality device Oculus Rift. Nothing has been specifically mentioned about the game's compatibility with the hardware, but Sony Online Entertainment has dropped heavy hints about the device's presence in their office. We can't help but get excited about the idea of virtually entering a world and physically building a fortress with our hands, or actually ripping down the walls of a cave as we wander around a lake of lava.

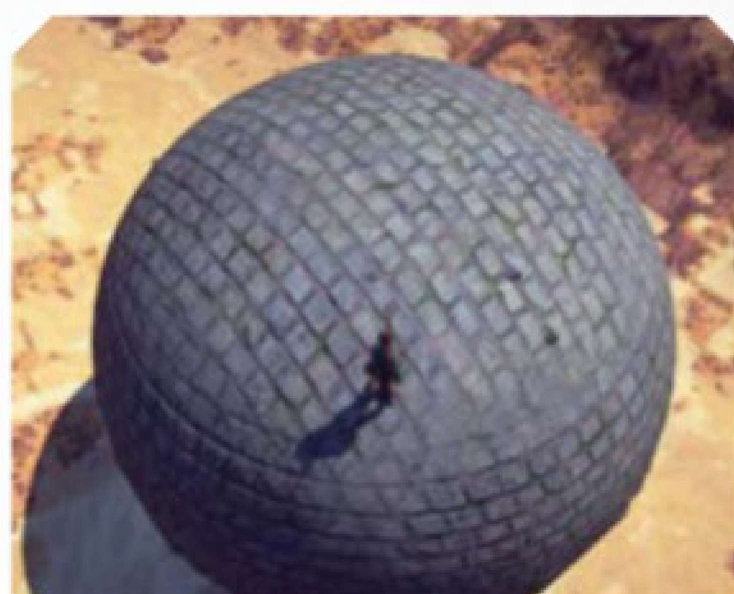


THE NEXT LEVEL OF WORLD BUILDING

EverQuest Landmark's advanced world creation tools with give digital architects more control over their designs than ever before. In an effort designed to presumably move away from the pixelated style of *Minecraft*, *Landmark* will allow players to effectively paint in 3D, with smoothing tools and brushes to alter the textures of structures they create once the basic building blocks have been laid.



OLDSPHERE
This image to the left was the best effort a player could achieve if they wanted to create spherical objects in old-style level editors, or in *Minecraft*.



NEWSPHERE
With *EverQuest Landmark*'s improved features, however, players can really let their imaginations run wild. We hope to see budding designers complete feats in *Landmark* that will make *Minecraft*'s uber-projects look paltry.

EVERQUEST NEXT

***Landmark* acts as a precursor to the main release of *EverQuest Next* – a pseudo-beta without being called a beta.** It's a win-win scenario for Sony Online Entertainment, really; it allows the company to monitor fan feedback and tweak the mechanics of the *EverQuest* world while simultaneously giving players chance to produce content they will see in-game. The tactic behind this staggered release comes down entirely to the immense ambition of what *Next* is trying to achieve.



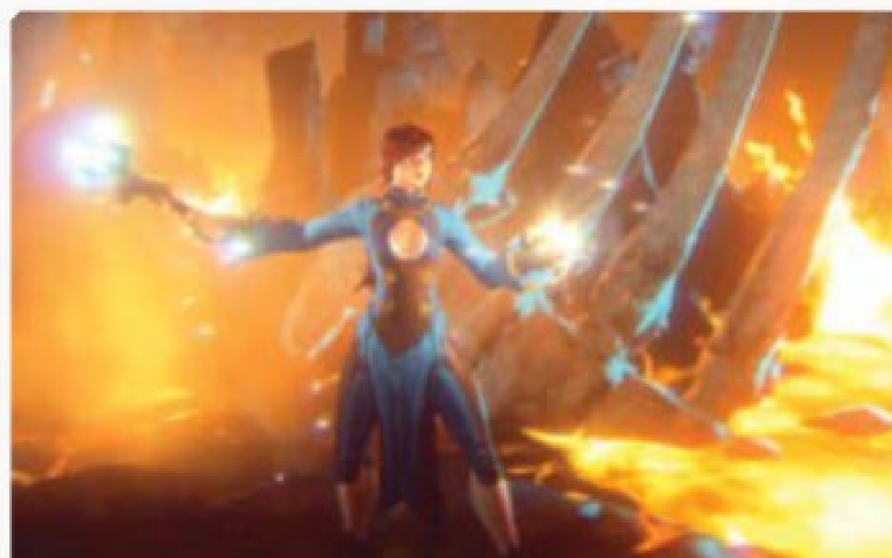
Destroy a section of the land, and you have no idea what could be waiting for you beyond the terrain.

The MMO genre has been stagnant for a while now, with developers opting to release big titles with small innovations in an effort to keep the core audience satiated with gameplay that is both recognisable and safe. *EverQuest Next* seeks to unpick that knot of familiarity by altering the template on which the typical MMO foundation is built. Using the voxel-creation dynamics of Landmark, the Norrath players will see in *EverQuest Next* will have fully destructible environments that can be destroyed by both players and rampaging AI. Damaged environs are procedurally generated, so the world will never face utter destruction, but the potential this destructible world offers for gameplay is staggering.

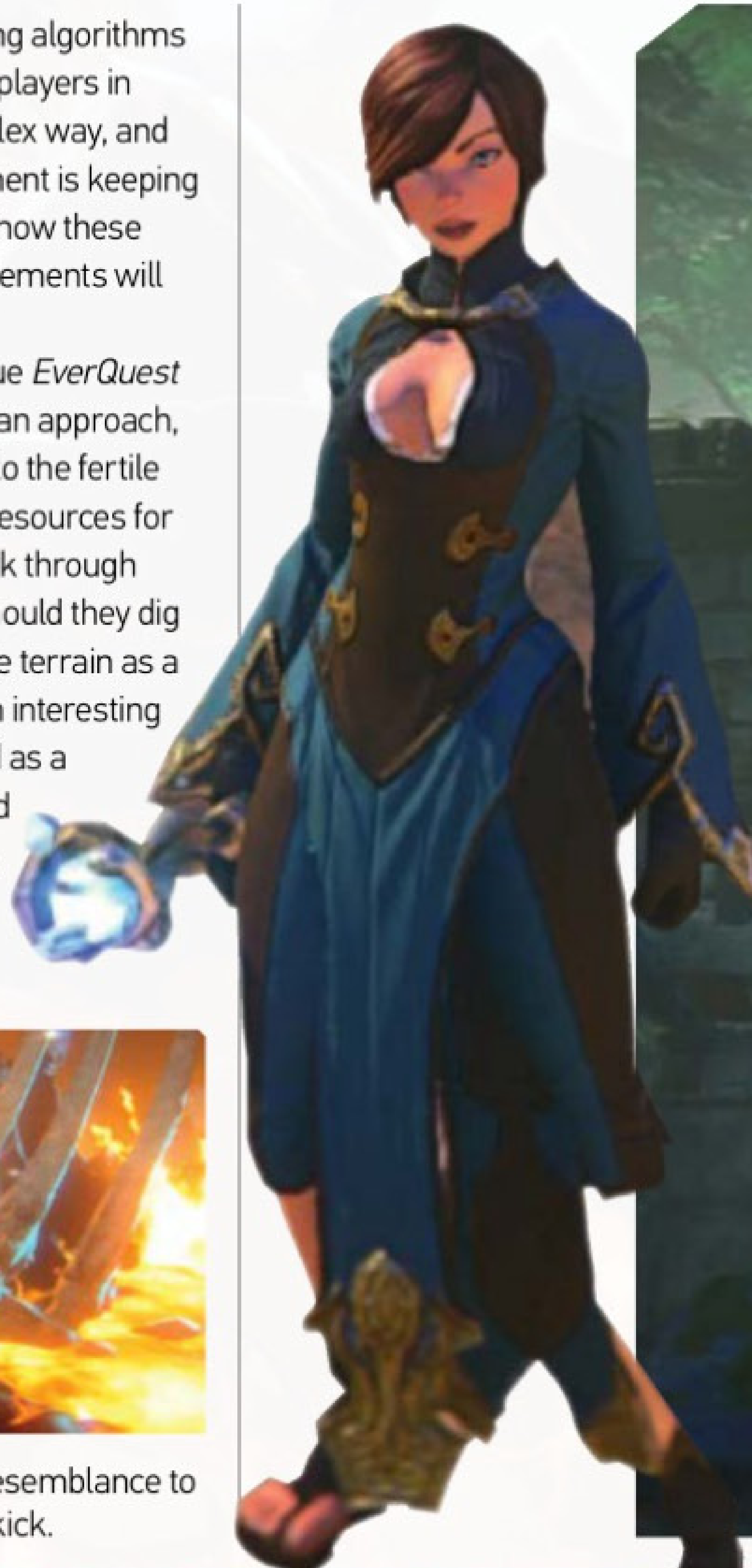
Imagine a hoard of violent, raging goblins pushing forward through a town you and your friends built, for example. There'd be far more investment in protecting the hamlet than if the settlement was composed purely of stock textures and interchangeable buildings – there'd be a much heavier sense of consequence. The promise of this fresh gameplay dynamic invokes a sense of responsiveness in the game, something that's been sadly lacking in MMOs for a long time. The AI has been improved to react to this new paradigm, too, with Sony Online Entertainment doing away with quests in order to open up the gameplay to a more player-focused angle.

According to the developers, *EverQuest Next* will guide players that need guidance while also letting players that feel they know what they're doing carry on doing their own thing. We have doubts about this – we're not sure quite how the programming algorithms will be able to detect and affect players in such a laser-focused and complex way, and for now Sony Online Entertainment is keeping fairly tight-lipped about exactly how these sorts of interactive gameplay elements will be implemented.

Another *Minecraft*-inspired cue *EverQuest* Next is taking is the subterranean approach, whereby players can burrow into the fertile grounds of Norrath to harvest resources for use in *EverQuest Next* and break through into entirely different realms, should they dig far enough. Utilising destructible terrain as a level-separating mechanic is an interesting idea and we expect it to be used as a buffer for keeping lower levelled players out of late-game areas. By having to mine through various layers of the earth's



This wizard bears a strong resemblance to a certain *BioShock Infinite* sidekick.



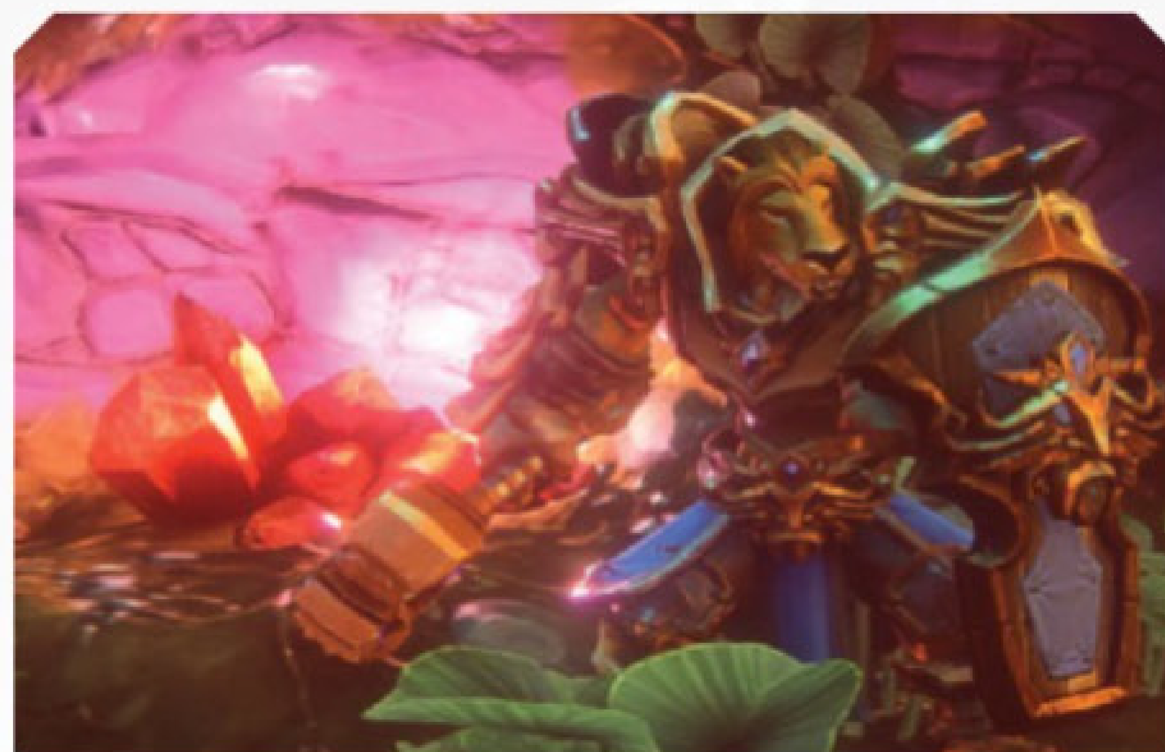
The scale of some of the enemies you'll encounter will dwarf even your most impressive structures. Hopefully you'll be able to mine this Iron Golem's corpse for more valuable building resources.

crust, it's possible that the game will disguise load times by having the player dig, too – a great tool for keeping persistent immersion.

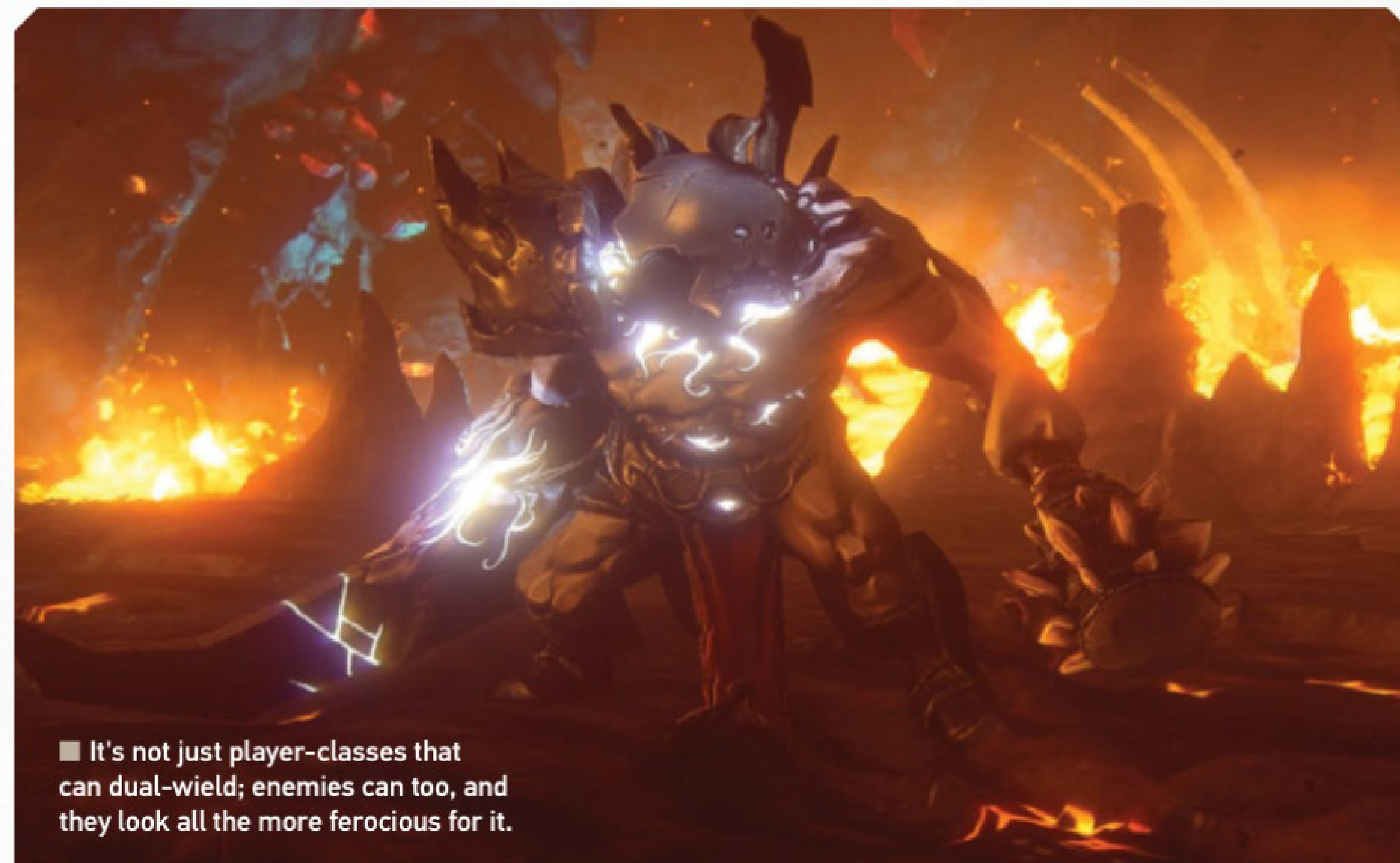
The developers are keen to highlight that the game will be truly, genuinely dynamic – that players committing certain actions will shape the experiences of other players. If you and your team are burrowing through a mountain somewhere, then that path will remain open until the game engine rebuilds that terrain later on. You literally carve your way through the world, with other players able to follow in your footsteps.

Navigation in the world has also been vastly improved since *EverQuest*'s humble origins: as with a majority of games these days, *EverQuest Next* has ventured down the parkour path, allowing players to perform extravagant acrobatics as they're traversing the environment. In an effort to promote player progression, these parkour skills won't all be available from the off – rather, they will be unlocked at higher levels. *EverQuest* pretty much invented the combat-focussed 3D MMORPG, and since the game's launch, Sony Online Entertainment has been introducing subtle innovations. With a relaunch of the game, and in adopting the Next suffix, it's clear that *EverQuest* is looking to drastically reinvent the genre it helped define. Set for a 2014 release, we're eager to see if the game can live up to its myriad assurances and not just become another victim of MMORPG hyperbole.









It's not just player-classes that can dual-wield; enemies can too, and they look all the more ferocious for it.



A CLASS OF THEIR OWN

EVERQUEST NEXT will launch with eight starting classes, with an extra 40 classes for you to 'find' in the field. Classes can be mixed to cater to your exact playstyle, and can be swapped out on the fly to suit the situations you find yourself in. The game isn't skill-based, either – character progression doesn't relate to how much you use a certain class, and experience can be shared between the various class-mixes you create. While there is no level system in *EverQuest Next*, it appears characters will be ranked in a tier system – something there still isn't too much information about. Character class determines their in-world appearance, which can be customised slightly to suit player preference, and each character will be able to wield two weapons at a time, replete with individual animations. Sony Online Entertainment has also revealed that there will be a slew of items available that will have an impact on character classes and their abilities, but details remain sparse at this point.





Beginner's Guide

DC UNIVERSE ONLINE

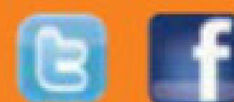
Life begins at 30. That's the unofficial catchphrase in *DC Universe Online*, an MMO that is effectively split in half. To begin with, there are the outdoors city of Metropolis and Gotham to explore, and it's here that the game feels like an MMO-lite. There's lots of grinding without the challenge, button-bashing combat without the depth and far too many poor attempts at Marvel characters trying to find new variants on taken names – seeing yet another 'Deadp00L' or 'BlueHulk' ruins the atmosphere somewhat. But hit the level cap at 30 and *DCUO* effectively becomes a whole new game. Level 30 players gain access to the high-level instances, which doubles the size of the raids from four players to eight and dramatically hikes the difficulty. This is where *DCUO*'s quirks and oddities come together in a glorious superpowered whole.

This is where the majority of the active player base can be found nowadays, using the Watchtower or Hall Of Doom as hubs to meet while queuing up for eight-player raids. Crucially, you don't need to belong to a league or guild to enjoy those raids. *DCUO* makes it extremely easy for strangers to hook up for raids, and the simple nature of the roles and movesets make it easy to understand your place in each group shortly after it's formed.

It's been an unusual evolution for *DCUO*, which has attempted to find some sort of middle ground for console players, MMO veterans and DC fans and didn't quite hit the mark with its initial release. It has had to adapt and evolve through updates and patches faster than SOE may have liked. But today, it's matured into an accessible MMO that's much lighter and frothier than its genre rivals. Perhaps best of all, its free-to-play model is surprisingly liberating, effectively letting you play the entire game with few limitations. If you don't mind menu management – the biggest restriction on those playing for free is limited inventory space and a cap on in-game money – there's no reason to pay for *DCUO* at all. Besides showing your support, of course. After all, life is pretty good fun at 30…

Which guide would you like to see tackled next?

Let us know on Twitter or Facebook



5 WAYS TO Complete Instances in DC Universe Online

1 Know Your Role

Check what role your other team-mates are playing. You can either play DPS or your 'specialised' role depending on your initial powerset – Tank, Healer or Controller. Avoid having too many of one class in your group.

2 Keep Your Power Up

The Controller is the key to a strong group, as they keep everyone's power level up. Watch for an electricity icon under your name – if it's present, your power will automatically recharge and you can be more liberal with use of your special skills.

3 Have A Defensive Supercharge

Your supercharge bar takes a long time to fill, so its best use is as a last-gasp defensive measure. Pick any supercharge move that refills shields, power, blocks attacks and so on for your hotbar and don't pick more than one.

4 Wait For The Entire Team

When you activate the showdown with mid-instance bosses or end boss, you'll be locked in the room. This also means any team members on the outside will be locked out, so wait for everyone to catch up and enter the room before activating the boss.

5 Look Out For Health Barrels

Barrels with a plus on the side are often the life-saver, when you have no supercharge move available and health sodas are cooling down. Keep a mental note of where they are and try not to attack them by mistake during boss encounters.

Legion Of Superheroes

GETTING STARTED WITH DC UNIVERSE ONLINE

PICK YOUR POWER

WHEN YOU CREATE your character, you have to choose between the Hero and Villain side. Nothing really changes bar some of the minor mission objectives and who you can have as a mentor but it's worth bearing in mind the Hero servers are slightly more active and they tend to win PvP battles slightly more often. When you choose your power, this is effectively choose your role: Fire, Ice and Earth is Tank, Light, Gadgets, Quantum and Mental is Controller while Sorcery, Nature, Electricity and Celestial is Healing.





FOLLOW YOUR JOURNAL

WHEN YOU CLEAR the Brainiac's ship, which serves as the linear tutorial, it can be overwhelming to figure out where to go and what to do. The easiest way to cut through *DCUO*'s wealth of options is to stick to your Journal (press Start – it will be the fourth tab along). Just keep accepting and completing Journal missions, which will take you through the basics of the game and help you understand how everything works.



HELPING HAND

WHEN COMPLETING MISSIONS in Gotham or Metropolis, you may find them tough. Each mission has a number next to it indicating what level enemies will be. If it's higher than yours, you need to pack a lot of colas and have a Supercharge move ready. But what's even better is to call up the mini-menu with D-pad, select nearby players while attempting the mission and invite them to your group. This means you gain the benefit of group-wide powers (healing, power dumps, etc) and objectives stack among team members.



PVP

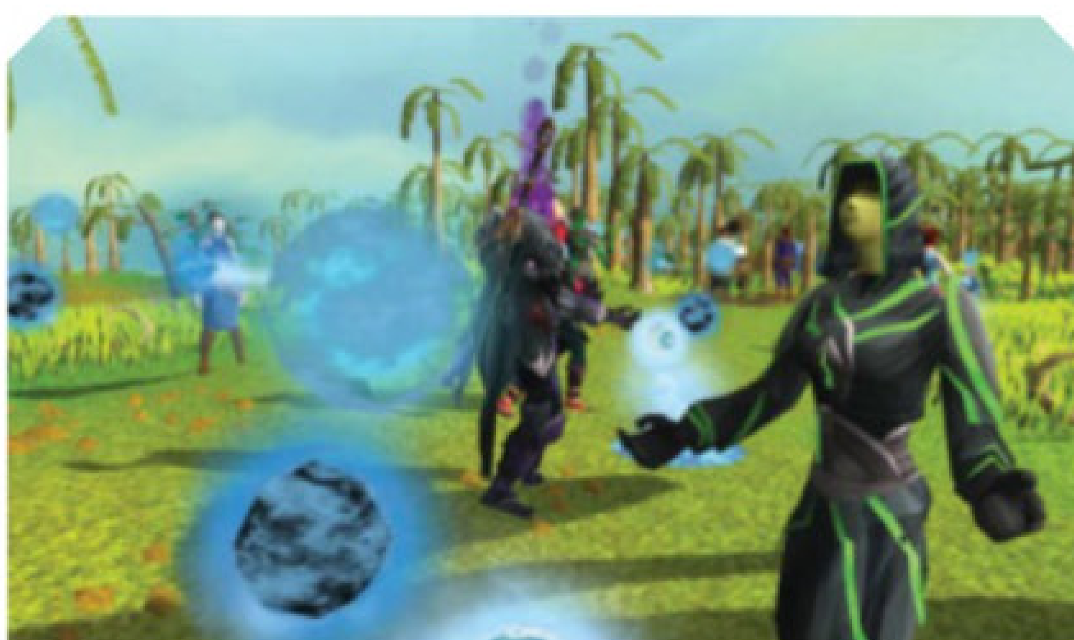
THERE IS PVP in *DCUO*, which is either the standard PvP with your own character or playing as a known DC comics 'name' in PvP Legends. Both can be found in the On Duty tab of the Start menu. Just remember that the point of playing PvP matches is to accrue currency that goes towards PvP gear. This is separate to PvE gear, so it's not a great way of bolstering your equipment or levels if you want to hit level 30 as soon as possible.



LEVEL 30

WHEN YOU HIT level 30, your On Duty tab will explode with a wealth of instances to choose from, which come with their own quirks and rules. Worth remembering: your combat rating dictates which missions you can tackle (you can find it under your stats on the inventory tab) and this is determined by the gear you have equipped. It's also only worth doing raids once a day, as subsequent attempts lock out rare drops until the instance refreshes.





Dean Ollive

Content development manager, RuneScape 3

AVATAR NAME: C3DPO

LEVEL: Combat Level = 198 / Total Level 2156

FACTION/CLASS: All – I switch between styles

COMPANION: Spirit War Pig (Fun) Pack Yak (Efficiency)

Describe your loadout.
I prefer melee for most scenarios, so use Tetsu or Bandos plate bodies/legs in conjunction with the devastating Drygore maces. I aim to go for max critical hit boosting items for quicker kills and therefore more gold pieces per hour.

What's been your most epic quest?
I would have to say the most prominent memory is of a very old quest, 'Dragon Slayer'. I was a noob to the game and was attempting to kill the boss, Elvarg. Being somewhat under-levelled, I died numerous times to this dragon. One morning I left my house at around 6am for the two-hour drive to work; upon arrival I had an hour to slay Elvarg.

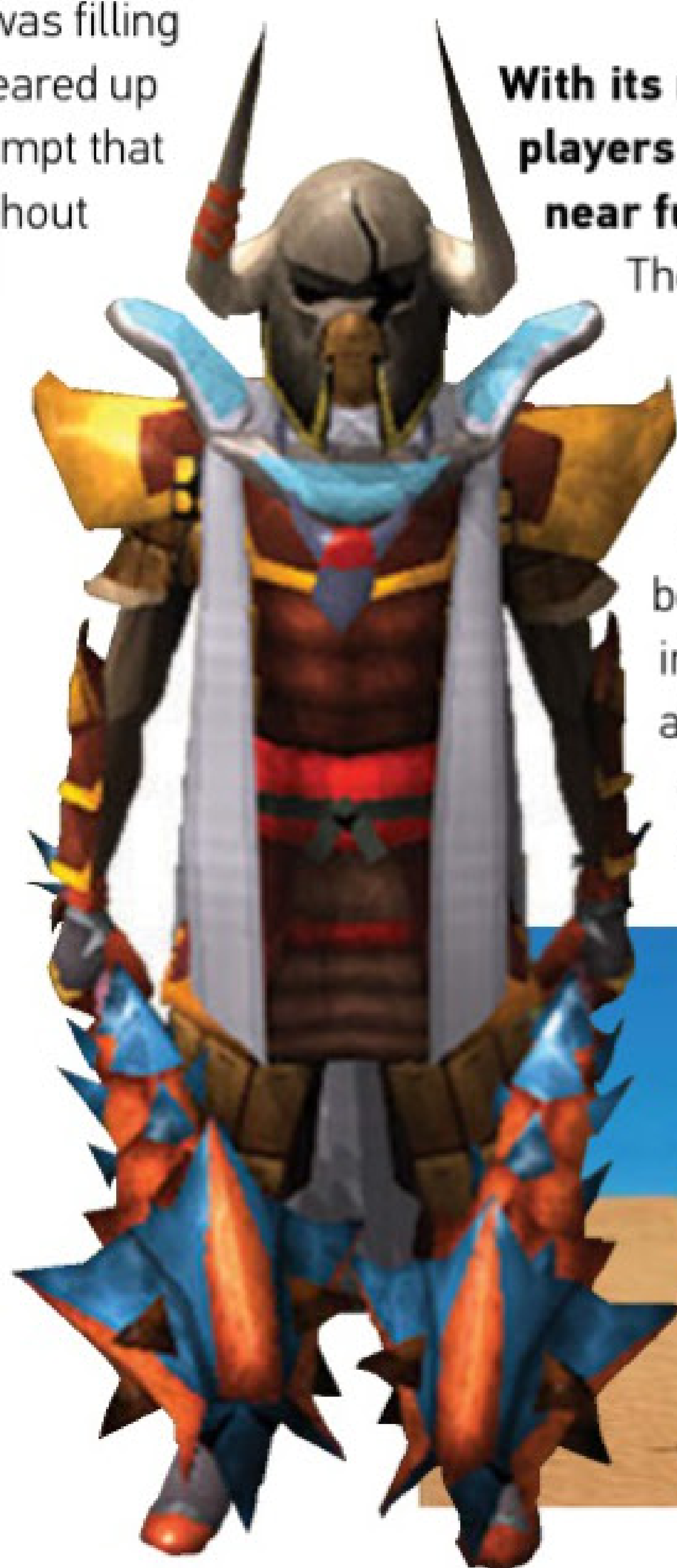
Several attempts later, the office was filling up and with my time running out, I geared up for one final effort. It was on this attempt that I managed to slay the dragon, yet without realising I leapt off my seat, punched the air and let out a war cry as if I was actually there!

Is a full release on home platforms something you'd consider with the arrival of next-gen hardware?
Absolutely, and we've been considering it for years. This next-generation of hardware is taking a step towards being open to free-to-play, so I hope that *RuneScape* on consoles could soon become a reality. That being said, I do worry about the manufacturers' tight control and ongoing dependence on retail could throttle innovation in business models. It's something we'll continue to keep an eye on, but we've no current plans.

What are the challenges of adapting *RuneScape 3* to tablet devices?
Other than the technical challenges related to this, I think one of the most prominent challenges is identify how players interact with our game through a touch enabled device. *RuneScape* uses a point and click mechanic to move characters, which translates very well to such devices. There are design challenges however, such as how to handle the right-clicks or pointer precision sometimes demanded during gameplay. This is what we're working to solve at the moment. Beyond the core gameplay, we're also looking at over a decade of content additions, and making sure they'll translate well to the different input mechanism.

With its new episodic structure, what can players expect from *RuneScape 3* in the near future?
The Battle for Lumbridge – the first ever world event in *RuneScape*'s history – has already been unleashed, and we plan to build on this epic scale of storytelling. The most exciting aspect being that we are putting our players in the director's chair. This means that although the team will lay the roads, our players decide which path to take and where it ends!

> "Without realising I leapt off my seat, punched the air and let out a war cry as if I was actually there!"





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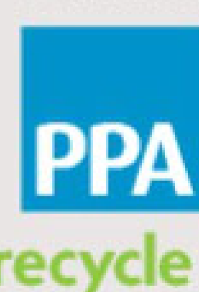
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1 COIN 1 PLAY

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2	SDM	009250
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4	ISS	007500
5	141	007250
6	OUT	005350
7	NOV	002013
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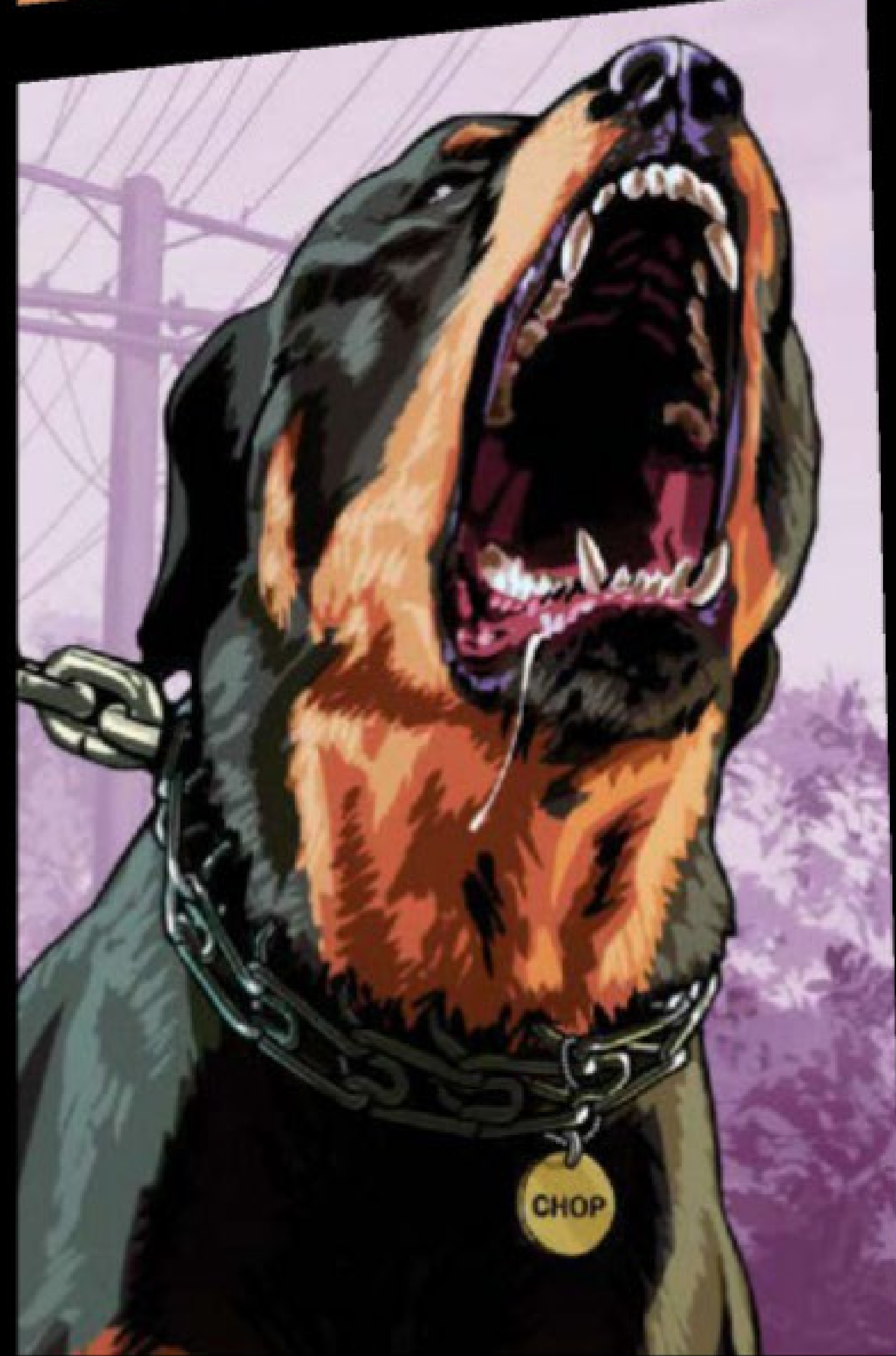




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